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November 20, 2020

Inter and Intra Party Competition: The 2020 Georgia Special Senate Election

Introduction/ Overview

This election cycle, Georgia faced a unique situation with both of their senate seats up for election as a result of a special election for the remaining two terms of Senator Isackson's seat, which was vacated late last year as a result of Isackson citing health issues.¹ As of Monday, November 23rd, the race resulted with Democrat Reverend Raphael Warnock in the lead with 1,617,035 votes (32.9%), and incumbent senator, Kelly Loeffler- who was appointed in January- in second with 1,273,214 votes (25.9%). Also receiving significant portions of the vote were Republican Representative Doug Collins, closely trailing Loeffler with 980,454 votes (20%) and Democrat Deborah Jackson in distant 4th with 324,118 votes (6.6%).² Following Georgia state law, the election resulted in a runoff vote to be held on January 5th between Warnock and Loeffler as a result of no candidate receiving a majority of the votes.

To garner support and advance to the runoff, both Warnock and Loeffler had to beat out a total of twenty-one candidates for the seat, including eight Democrats and six Republicans.³ Ultimately, the race came down between three primary candidates of Loeffler, Warnock, and

¹ Burgess Everett, "Sen. Johnny Isackson to Resign at End of the Year," POLITICO, August 28, 2019, <https://www.politico.com/story/2019/08/28/sen-johnny-isackson-to-resign-at-end-of-the-year-1476655>.

² Jason Bernert Peter Andringa, "Georgia 2020 Live Election Results," The Washington Post (WP Company, November 25, 2020), https://www.washingtonpost.com/elections/election-results/georgia-2020/?itid=sn_election-2020.

³ "United States Senate Special Election in Georgia, 2020," Ballotpedia, 2020, https://ballotpedia.org/United_States_Senate_special_election_in_Georgia,_2020.

Collins who all polled evenly⁴ for much of the race resulting in Loeffler and Collins having to campaign not just against Warnock, but also against each other. Warnock, while having the highest polling average among Democrats for most of the race, had to figure out how to avoid other Democrats including Matt Lieberman from siphoning off Democratic votes that risked bumping him to third and missing the runoff.

Ultimately, Warnock was able to advance to the runoff as a result of a consolidation of Democratic support by way of key endorsements, strong messaging on healthcare, and high levels of support among the black community. Loeffler was able to hold on for second place and earn a spot in the runoff through her financial advantage over Collins that allowed her to more effectively portray herself as a favorite of President Trump that led to strength among the Republican base. These developments set the stage for January 5th where Warnock will have to work to maintain high Democratic turnout in a historically red state, while Loeffler- in the face of a Trump presidential defeat in the state- serves to benefit by distancing herself from the President and most importantly continuing to play herself off as less radical than Warnock.

Campaign Finance: Setting the Stage

In a close election cycle with competition both from Republican and Democratic challengers to incumbent Republican incumbent Kelly Loeffler, financial funding is playing a vital role in who will, and who has so far, ultimately come out on top. Both early on and as election day neared, Warnock was able to build a strong base of fundraising from Democratic support groups that allowed him to build better name recognition and get out his messaging. This

⁴ Jason Bernert Peter Andringa, “Georgia 2020 Live Election Results,” The Washington Post (WP Company, November 25, 2020), https://www.washingtonpost.com/elections/election-results/georgia-2020/?itid=sn_election-2020.

allowed him to build separation from other Democratic challengers as well as stay competitive with Loeffler and Collins in a historically Republican state. Financially, Warnock has been particularly aided by Democrats' desire nationwide to flip Georgia, with as much as 78% of his funding coming from out-of-state donors.⁵ In particular, Warnock had a strong 3rd quarter showing, raising \$12 million between July to September, up from \$2.8 million the quarter before⁶. In addition to increased fundraising efforts as a result of the election drawing nearer, Warnock's fundraising also benefited from the consolidation of Democratic support behind him- though other Democratic candidates such as Joe Lieberman resisted calls to drop out. Warnock also benefited from public national displays of support for Warnock, especially from the WNBA whose players largely publicly supported Warnock in response to Loeffler's- who owns the Atlanta Dream- criticism of the Black Lives Matter Movement. Through these successful fundraising efforts, Warnock was able to raise similar numbers to Loeffler despite Loeffler contributing a substantial amount of her personal wealth. Through October 14th, the FEC reported that Warnock had raised approximately \$22 million in total while Loeffler had raised \$28 including her own contributions to her campaign.

Loeffler, in contrast, relied heavily on self-funding, having lent her campaign a total of \$20 million to her campaign through September.⁷ Because of this, Loeffler was able to invest substantially in advertising from early on in the race, investing in a 4 million dollar ad buy

⁵ Tia Mitchell, "Georgia 2020: Democratic Candidates Outpace Republicans in Third-Quarter Fundraising," ajc (The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, October 16, 2020), <https://www.ajc.com/politics/election-2020-Democratic-candidates-outpace-Republicans-in-third-quarter-fundraising/BR5DZTOLY5FETMMSD4TY7GTVWI/>.

⁶ "Summary Data: Georgia Senate Runoff Election: January 5, 2021," OpenSecrets, October 14, 2020, <https://www.opensecrets.org/races/summary?cycle=2020>.

⁷ Tia Mitchell, "Georgia 2020"

beginning in May.⁸ This ad buy, however, was necessary damage control after revelations that Loeffler sold stocks shortly after a coronavirus briefing in March and was being investigated for possible insider trading.⁹ This causes Loeffler's personal fortune to have had a potentially large role in the race. Loeffler's wealth allowed her to play damage control when her reputation was the lowest, while none of the other candidates had the campaign contribution yet to counter Loeffler's ad buy, allowing to cement herself as the perceived front runner. Compared to Warnock, Loeffler only reported \$2 million in 3rd quarter donations¹⁰ making her continued support of her own campaign vital to her ultimately maintaining a top-two spot in the election to make the runoff.

Opposed to Warnock and Loeffler, Collins struggled to keep pace financially. Like Loeffler, he only reported \$2 million in earnings in the 3rd quarter¹¹ and had only raised approximately \$6 million in total as of October 14th.¹² However, Collins' campaign did not have the luxury of vast private wealth to spend on his campaign, and as a result Collins spent less on advertising than Warnock and Loeffler, leaving him at a disadvantage. While Collins greatly benefited in polling from Loeffler's lack of popularity on account of her multiple scandals, his financial struggles in part prevented him from mounting more of a challenge to surpass her in the final vote tally to make the runoff.

⁸ Greg Bluestein, "Georgia Senate: Loeffler to Put \$4M behind a Wave of New Ads," ajc (The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, May 4, 2020), <https://www.ajc.com/blog/politics/georgia-senate-loeffler-put-behind-wave-new-ads/Jcf2ijVn3MtyXspdJsjMGI/>.

⁹ Dan Mangan, "SEC Warns on Coronavirus Insider Trading after Stock Sales by NYSE Chair, His Wife Sen. Loeffler, 3 Other Senators," CNBC (CNBC, March 23, 2020), <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/23/coronavirus-sec-warns-on-insider-trading-after-loeffler-sales.html>.

¹⁰ Tia Mitchell, "Georgia 2020"

¹¹ Tia Mitchell, "Georgia 2020"

¹² "Summary Data", Open Secrets

Message and Support

Messaging in this election became particularly important because candidates had to compete not only sway undecideds towards their party, but they also had to provide a message that would win over the support of their party's base over other candidates from the same party. For Republicans, messaging was most important not to gain an advantage over Warnock or other Democratic candidates but rather to differentiate between the two leading Republican candidates in Loeffler and Collins. Both Loeffler and Collins ultimately decided that their best chance to gain an advantage over their fellow party mate was to compete for the party base rather than trying to win over independents. Each attempted to portray themselves as a conservative juggernaut closely tied to Trump, while simultaneously portraying the other as out of touch and too sympathetic to the Democratic cause to be elected.

Loeffler personally had to start on the defensive and focus her messaging on her self-image as a result of multiple scandals during her campaign, including accusations that she benefited from insider trading in March. She also came under increased fire from Democrats over her position on the WNBA's advocacy for Black Lives Matter, saying in a tweet that the “@WNBA should stand for and unite around the American Flag -- not divisive political movements like BLM that unapologetically seek to defund the police.”¹³ As a result, Loeffler's early campaign messaging focused on painting her as a humanitarian and philanthropist, with ads that initially aired in May citing her donation of her senate salary to fight coronavirus and her use

¹³ Reuters Staff, “WNBA Stands by Black Lives Matter Theme, Defying Atlanta Team's Co-Owner,” Reuters (Thomson Reuters, July 7, 2020), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-basketball-nba-loeffler/wnba-stands-by-black-lives-matter-theme-defying-atlanta-teams-co-owner-idUSKBN24836A>.

of her private plane to help Georgians stuck in other countries get home when coronavirus related travel restrictions began.¹⁴ Around the same time, the FEC announced that Loeffler was no longer being investigated for insider trading, further helping Loeffler.¹⁵ There is strong evidence that the combination of these factors may have helped Loeffler salvage her campaign. In March and April following the news of her being investigated by the FEC, Loeffler's polling average dropped to around 11%, and challenger Doug Collins opened up a 10 point lead over her. However, by the end of June, Loeffler's numbers rebounded to the mid-20s and she opened up a slight lead over Collins and the other candidates.¹⁶

Around the same time, Loeffler also began running attack ads against her opponents early on in the race. Another ad released by Loeffler in May shows Collins hugging prominent Democrat Stacey Abrams and accuses him of being soft to the Democratic Party.¹⁷ As a result, Collins also had to spend much of the early campaign on the defensive, fending off attacks that he was too liberal. He pointed out in interviews and ads that in the house he has historically

¹⁴ Greg Bluesteing, "Loeffler to put \$4 million behind a wave of new ads"

¹⁵ Katelyn Burns, "Kelly Loeffler and 2 Other Senators Are No Longer Being Investigated for Insider Trading," Vox (Vox, May 27, 2020), <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2020/5/27/21271726/kelly-loeffler-senators-investigation-insider-trading>.

¹⁶ Andrea Jones-Rooy et al., eds., "Georgia U.S. Senate Polls," FiveThirtyEight, November 25, 2020, <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/polls/senate/georgia/>.

¹⁷ Fadel Allassan and Alayna Treene, "Kelly Loeffler Ties Doug Collins to Stacey Abrams in New Ad Campaign," Axios, May 26, 2020, <https://wwwaxios.com/kelly-loeffler-doug-collins-stacey-abrams-ad-campaign-65ee2c6b-92a5-441c-99c0-581a42c40f0b.html>.

voted with President Trump 97%¹⁸ of the time and that he was originally President Trump’s preferred pick to be appointed to the seat when Isackson resigned.¹⁹

As the campaign continued, both candidates continued campaigning as decisively right-wing candidates. Collins ran heavily on his military background and congressional record, citing “Supporting President Trump” as his number one issue on his campaign website.²⁰ Likewise, Collins also ran negative ads against his Republican opponent, targeting Loeffler for her stock trading scandal in March and “using her family fortune to falsely attack President Trump’s strongest defender.”²¹

Loeffler similarly competed with Collins to portray herself to voters as the “most conservative.” In addition to attacks on Collins that he was too liberal, Loeffler went viral on the internet for a campaign ad that described her as being “more conservative than Atilla the Hun,” and bragged that she was “ranked the most conservative US Senator.”²² The ad, which originally aired in late September, was seen as a spectacle by much of the media;²³²⁴ however, compared

¹⁸ Lee Shearer, “In Race for Senate Seat, Doug Collins Brings Long Record of Conservative Votes, Stances,” Athens Banner-Herald (Athens Banner-Herald, October 8, 2020), <https://www.onlineathens.com/news/20201008/in-race-for-senate-seat-doug-collins-brings-long-record-of-conservative-votes-stances>.

¹⁹ Brakkton Booker, “Against Trump’s Wishes, Georgia Gov. Appoints Kelly Loeffler To Fill Senate Seat,” NPR (NPR, December 4, 2019), <https://www.npr.org/2019/12/04/784743977/against-trumps-wishes-georgia-gov-appoints-kelly-loeffler-to-fill-senate-seat>.

²⁰ Doug Collins, “Doug Collins on the Issues,” Doug Collins for Senate, 2020, <https://www.dougforgeorgia.com/issues>.

²¹ Marina Pitofsky, “Doug Collins Questions Loeffler’s Trustworthiness in First TV Ad,” TheHill (The Hill, July 28, 2020), <https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/509314-doug-collins-questions-loefflers-trustworthiness-in-first-tv-ad>.

²² Caroline Kelly, “New Kelly Loeffler Ad Asserts She’s ‘More Conservative than Atilla the Hun’,” CNN (Cable News Network, September 22, 2020), <https://www.cnn.com/2020/09/21/politics/kelly-loeffler-ad-attila-the-hun/index.html>.

²³ Seth Cohen, “In Bizarre Ad, Georgia Senator Kelly Loeffler Compares Herself To Attila The Hun,” Forbes (Forbes Magazine, September 22, 2020), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/sethcohen/2020/09/21/in-bizarre-ad-georgia-senator-kelly-loeffler-compares-herself-to-attila-the-hun/?sh=28943601e7fe>.

²⁴ Alexandra Petri, “Opinion | The Principled Conservatism of Attila the Hun,” The Washington Post (WP Company, September 22, 2020), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/09/22/principled-conservatism-attila-hun/>.

with other messaging efforts, the ad won Loeffler free publicity that may have helped win over members of the Republican base.

Exit polls suggest that Loeffler ultimately won over Trump's most ardent supporters, winning voters who self-identified as conservative by almost 20% over Collins 52% to 34%. While Loeffler still narrowly beat Collins with self-identified moderates, the margin was much smaller, only winning 5% more of the vote than Collins,²⁵ indicating that Loeffler was able to beat out Collins for a spot in the runoff largely because she was able to win over the voters who were strongest supporters of Trump.

Both Loeffler and Collins also ran ads attacking Warnock and Democratic policies, with Loeffler specifically attacking Warnock over his stance on the nomination of Justice Amy Coney Barret and accusing him of wanting to defund the police.²⁶ However, attacks by Republican candidates on Warnock were noticeably less prevalent than typical campaigns, with the majority of negative messaging being directed at Collins by Loeffler. As a result, neither Loeffler nor Collins made much of an attempt to appeal towards moderate or independent voters leading up to the November 4th election, with Warnock winning nearly 50% of moderates on election day with neither Loeffler nor Collins winning more than 20%.²⁷

In comparison to Loeffler or Collins, Warnock ran a much more positive campaign than Loeffler and Collins, both in respect to his Democratic and Republican opponents, primarily focusing his messaging on expanding medicare and making healthcare more affordable as the

²⁵ Leslie Shapiro and Brittany Mayes, "Exit Poll Results and Analysis from Georgia," The Washington Post (WP Company, November 7, 2020), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/elections/interactive/2020/exit-polls/georgia-exit-polls/>.

²⁶ AllOnGeorgia, "Another Round of Political Ads for Georgia Voters," AllOnGeorgia, October 2, 2020, <https://allongeorgia.com/georgia-state-politics/another-round-of-political-ads-for-georgia-voters/>.

²⁷ Leslie Shapiro and Brittany Mayes, "Exit Poll Results and Analysis from Georgia"

central priority of his campaign.²⁸ Warnock also focused on his experience as a community leader and civil rights activist as a Reverend at the same church as Martin Luther King Jr, attempting to appeal to low-income and minority voters.²⁹ Evidently, the more positive message paid off for Warnock in the general election. Public Policy Polling finding Warnock had a +21 net favorability rating compared to Loeffler, who was underwater by a similar margin at -18 net approval. ³⁰ Warnock was also able to keep his messaging more positive because he did not have competition among other Democrats in the same way that Loeffler and Collins had to face each other. However, moving forward Warnock will have to be able to handle more negative ads against him if he is to stand a chance in January, as Loeffler is now freer to run attack ads against him now that Collins is out of the race.

Endorsements

Especially for Warnock, key endorsements played a big part in narrowing down the candidates. Fellow Democrat Matt Lieberman enjoyed early support in polling, in large part because of name recognition thanks to his father, former Congressman Joe Lieberman. Warnock and Lieberman ran close to each other in early polls- each hovering between 15-20% until around mid-July when Warnock began to pull ahead.³¹ Perhaps not coincidentally, Warnock

²⁸ Raphael Warnock, “Health Care: The Right to Access Affordable, Quality Care,” Warnock for Georgia, August 19, 2020, <https://warnockforgeorgia.com/issues/healthcare/>.

²⁹ Stephen Fowler, “Warnock Unveils Second TV Ad In Wide-Open Senate Election,” Georgia Public Broadcasting, August 26, 2020, <https://www.gpb.org/news/2020/08/26/warnock-unveils-second-tv-ad-in-wide-open-senate-election>.

³⁰ Public Policy. “Georgia Trending Well For Democrats.” Public Policy Polling, October 29, 2020. <https://www.publicpolicypolling.com/polls/georgia-trending-well-for-Democrats/>.

³¹ Andrea Jones-Rooy et al., eds., “Georgia U.S. Senate Polls”

announced that he had won endorsements of twenty-five sitting U.S. Democratic Senators on July 13th, including Chris Murphy, Tammy Duckworth, and Amy Klobuchar.³² The new batch of endorsements joined the five members of the senate and former Presidential candidates Elizabeth Warren, Kamala Harris, Corey Booker, Kristen Gillibrand, and Micheal Bennet that had previously endorsed Warnock in June.³³ Notably, Warnock had also won the support of prominent Georgia politician Stacey Abrams back when he announced his candidacy in January.³⁴

Around this time, Warnock also notably benefited from the support of WNBA players, who for games on August 4th showed up in shirts that proclaimed “Vote Warnock,” largely in response to Loeffler’s attacks of the league’s stance and support of Black Lives Matter.³⁵ In the two days following the endorsement of the WNBA players, Warnock saw a fundraising boost, raising \$183,000³⁶ while also sparking press coverage needed to boost Warnock’s name recognition with potential voters.

Lieberman began to fade into August and into September as Warnock rose into the mid-20s, statically tied with Collins and Loeffler. However, Lieberman was still polling around

³² Raphael Warnock, “25 United States Senators Endorse Reverend Raphael Warnock for U.S. Senate,” Warnock for Georgia, August 18, 2020, <https://warnockforgeorgia.com/25-united-states-senators-endorse-reverend-raphael-warnock-for-u-s-senate/>.

³³ Raphael Warnock, “Five Former Presidential Candidates Endorse Reverend Raphael Warnock for U.S. Senate,” Warnock for Georgia, August 18, 2020, <https://warnockforgeorgia.com/five-former-presidential-candidates-endorse-reverend-raphael-warnock-for-u-s-senate/>.

³⁴ Zack Budryk, “Stacey Abrams Endorses Atlanta Pastor in Georgia Senate Bid,” TheHill (The Hill, January 30, 2020), <https://thehill.com/homenews/senate/480765-stacey-abrams-endorses-rev-raphael-warnock-georgia-senate-bid>.

³⁵ Allison Gordon, “WNBA Revolts over Atlanta Dream Co-Owner Sen. Kelly Loeffler’s Comments about Black Lives Matter,” CNN (Cable News Network, July 8, 2020), <https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/07/us/kelly-loeffler-wnba-atlanta-dream-trnd/index.html>.

³⁶ Nancy Armour, “Commentary: By Speaking out, WNBA Players Are Altering U.S. Senate Race in Georgia,” Chicago Sun (Chicago Sun-Times, October 27, 2020), <https://chicago.suntimes.com/chicago-sky-and-wnba/2020/10/27/21536573/wnba-us-senate-election-raphael-warnock-kelly-loeffler-commentary-georgia>.

10-12% in most polls leading to concerns that he, along with other Democratic candidates, would siphon off voters that would otherwise vote for Warnock, risking Warnock finishing third and ending up with an all-Republican runoff. As a result, Democratic leadership pressured Lieberman to drop out, but he refused.³⁷ However, Warnock then gained another round of prominent Democratic endorsements in late September and early October, most notably former President Barack Obama³⁸ along with former President Jimmy Carter³⁹ and the mayor of Atlanta Keisha Bottoms⁴⁰. Obama's endorsement ended up largely cementing Warnock's place in the runoff. Following the announcement, Lieberman, while still not dropping out, quickly fell in the polls to single digits; meanwhile, Warnock rose into the mid-30s and began running consistently ahead of either Loeffler or Collins.⁴¹ Therefore, for Warnock, the overwhelming consolidation of key Democratic leaders was paramount for him to earn a spot in the runoff, as it both sparked favorable press coverage heading into the final stretch of the campaign and helped consolidate the Democratic base firmly behind him. Lieberman opposingly faded to only winning 2.2% of

³⁷ Burgess Everett and James Arkin, "Liebermans Haunt Democrats in Key Senate Races," POLITICO (POLITICO, October 2, 2020), <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/10/02/lieberman-Democrats-key-senate-races-424595>.

³⁸ Ben Nadler, "Obama Endorses Warnock in Crowded Georgia Senate Race," AP NEWS (Associated Press, September 25, 2020), <https://apnews.com/article/election-2020-senate-elections-georgia-doug-collins-elections-5bb3f0d250a4623b44a7ec3a07235eb1>.

³⁹ Greg Bluestein, "Jimmy Carter Backs Warnock in Crowded U.S. Senate Race in Georgia," ajc (The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, September 29, 2020), <https://www.ajc.com/politics/politics-blog/jimmy-carter-backs-warnock-in-crowded-us-senate-race-in-georgia/64CJQ3T7GBFRJM7EJJYUV7S2UE/>.

⁴⁰ Marshall A. Latimore, "#Election2020: Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms Endorses Jon Ossoff, the Rev. Raphael Warnock for U.S. Senate: The Atlanta Voice," The Atlanta Voice , October 10, 2020, <https://www.theatlantavoice.com/articles/election2020-atlanta-mayor-keisha-lance-bottoms-endorses-jon-ossoff-the-rev-raphael-warnock-for-u-s-senate/>.

⁴¹ Andrea Jones-Rooy et al., eds., "Georgia U.S. Senate Polls"

the final vote, also losing to fellow Democrat Deberah Jackson, the mayor of Lithonia who received little to no coverage from the media at any point during the race.⁴²

For the Republican candidates, endorsements didn't play nearly as large of a role as they did for Warnock. Each Loeffler and Collins picked up several prominent Republican endorsements- with Loeffler gaining the support of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, Georgia Governor Brian Kemp, and Nikki Haley,⁴³ while Collins won support from Representatives Matt Gaetz and Devin Nunes, Micheal Flynn, and Roger Stone.⁴⁴ However, none of these endorsements appeared to have substantively changed the race, largely canceling each other out with key Trump supporters supporting both candidates, and President Trump notably abstaining from openly supporting either candidate. While Collins in particular tried to advertise some of his key endorsements⁴⁵ as a way to catch up late in the race, there was little evidence that endorsements significantly impacted the support for Republican candidates come election day.

Presidential Correlation

Because this election was not a two-person race, and because this race is not over, the correlation of the results is less obvious than some other races. However, there is evidence that Democratic candidates as a whole were slightly less popular with voters than Presidential

⁴² Jason Bernert Peter Andringa, "Georgia 2020 Live Election Results"

⁴³ Kelly Loeffler, "Kelly's Endorsements," Kelly Loeffler, September 24, 2020, <https://kellyforsenate.com/endorsements/>.

⁴⁴ Doug Collins, "Doug Collins for Senate," Doug Collins for Senate, 2020, <https://www.dougforgeorgia.com/>.

⁴⁵ Richard Fausset, "To Prove His Trump Credentials, Doug Collins, Georgia Senate Candidate, Campaigns with Roger Stone," The New York Times (The New York Times, November 2, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/02/us/politics/to-prove-his-trump-credentials-doug-collins-georgia-senate-candidate-campaigns-with-roger-stone.html>.

nominee Joe Biden was, while Republican candidates ran about even with President Trump in terms of the percentage of the vote. Based on preliminary results, Loeffler, Collins, and every other Republican candidate won a combined 49.3% of the vote, identical to the President's vote share. However, while President Trump lost the state of Georgia in the Presidential election, Republican candidates in the special senatorial election won a marginally higher combined vote share than Democratic ones. Warnock, Jackson, Lieberman, and other Democrats only won 48.4% of the vote compared to Joe Biden's 49.5% win statewide⁴⁶.

Like Biden, Warnock performed the best in the Atlanta metro region, especially among black voters. Despite the multitude of candidates, Warnock still won an astounding 69% of the black vote according to exit polls, which comparatively correlates to Biden's also impressive 88% in a much smaller race. Similarly, Loeffler and Collins each struggled with black voters on a similar level with President Trump, each winning 6% of the black vote whereas the President won 11%. The close correlation between Democratic and Republican support also existed for white voters, which voted approximately 70% for Donald Trump and Republican Candidates versus 30% for Joe Biden and Democratic Candidates⁴⁷.

For Republican candidates, Doug Collins performed the best in his home district in northeast Georgia, where he neared 50% of the vote in most counties. Collins also won parts of southern Georgia, but not by quite as much as his home district.⁴⁸ Like Collins' home district, southern Georgia was also one of the strongest areas of support for President Trump, which may

⁴⁶ Jason Bernert Peter Andringa, "Georgia 2020 Live Election Results"

⁴⁷ Leslie Shapiro and Brittany Mayes, "Exit Poll Results and Analysis from Georgia"

⁴⁸ Leslie Shapiro and Brittany Mayes, "Exit Poll Results and Analysis from Georgia"

have suggested that Collins succeeded in making inroads with the President's biggest supporters. However, Loeffler won other areas of the state that went similarly heavy for Trump such as the northwest, leaving no apparent correlation between the Presidential election and special election when comparing Loeffler and Collins.

Conclusion on the November Outcome

While Warnock won in part because of his realistic message and reputation as a community leader, the overwhelming endorsements of his campaign by Democratic leaders ultimately were the biggest factor in driving Warnock into the January runoff. Warnock entered the race in January with little name recognition and support in the single digits, but because of early endorsements by political heavyweights such as Stacey Abrams, and later endorsements by the majority of U.S Democratic Senators, WNBA players, and former President Barack Obama, Warnock gained both and emerged with a leading 32.9% of the vote. In part aided by endorsements, Warnock also was carried to success through fundraising, raising enough from individual donations to compete with Loeffler for airtime in the waning weeks of the race. In addition, the inter-party competition between Loeffler and Collins helped Warnock keep his messaging issue-oriented and positive, earning him competitively higher favorability ratings compared to his competitors.

Loeffler, on the other hand, finished runner-up over Doug Collins primarily because her vast investment of her personal wealth allowed her to invest in ads and messaging that Collins was unable to match. While Loeffler did successfully get her messaging and her attacks against Collins to resonate with Republicans, it was largely because she had the capital to broadcast it

across the media. Loeffler did, however, also have more success in getting free media attention than Collins, notably for her ad comparing herself to Atila the Hun. While the ad mostly drew mockery from the media, it still made Loeffler the key Republican candidate the election news cycle was talking about heading into the final weeks of the election.

Finally, Collins failed to make the runoff for the same reasons that Loeffler made it. Collins lacked the necessary financial backing to truly challenge for a spot in the runoff, having had approximately 20 million fewer dollars available to his campaign than Loeffler- the same amount that Loeffler put into her own campaign. While Collins' military background and staunchly conservative message appealed to many voters, and while he gained support from Loeffler's multiple scandals and controversies, Collins did not have the ability to sufficiently respond to Loeffler's smears of him and as a result, he paid for it on election day. It is worth a note of reference that Collins could have also been hurt in the final days of the election by the Air Force's announcement issued a warning to Collins after he wore his military uniform in a campaign ad without a required disclaimer.⁴⁹ While I believe that Loeffler would have still prevailed because of her financial advantage, the military's reproof at Collins' ad may have added one final nail in the coffin to cement Collins' loss.

Analyzing the results of the November election as a whole, the ability to financially support a robust campaign was the single-most-important factor. The entire election cycle, Loeffler had access to the most wealth through her private fortune and Warnock performed the best in fundraising efforts, and, uncoincidentally, they were the two candidates who came out on

⁴⁹ Ramsey Touchberry and Naveed Jamali, "Defense Department to Counsel Republican for Improperly Using Military Uniform in Campaign Ads," Newsweek (Newsweek, October 28, 2020), <https://www.newsweek.com/defense-department-counsel-Republican-improperly-using-military-uniform-campaign-ads-1542708>.

top. Like most partisan races across the country, voters were heavily influenced by their Presidential choice in choosing which senate candidate to vote for. However, the Presidential election itself had a smaller impact on who made the runoff because of the high number of candidates and competition between multiple members of the same party that in the end increased the importance of the financial advantages between candidates.

Addendum- What's to come?

Looking ahead to the runoff election between Warnock and Loeffler on January 5th, both candidates need to take critical steps if they are to be the eventual winner. For Loeffler, her campaign needs to mitigate the ongoing chaos surrounding President Trump's refusal to concede. Republican leaders have begun to express concerns that turnout in favor of Loeffler could be repressed because a large portion of Trump voters believe the election is rigged, which could lead to voters staying home.⁵⁰ In the last couple of weeks, Loeffler has also been battling another round of bad press coverage. Her coronavirus diagnosis⁵¹ has sidelined her from campaigning and could additionally lend additional credibility to Warnock's healthcare message. Additionally, Loeffler has recently come under fire for soliciting campaign donations in a speech in the Capitol, a violation under U.S law⁵². Her scandals and the negative campaign run between

⁵⁰ Jenny Jarvie, "As Georgia GOP Feuds over Trump Loss, Might It Hurt Party Turnout for Senate Runoffs?," Los Angeles Times (Los Angeles Times, November 23, 2020), <https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2020-11-23/in-georgia-gop-infighting-looms-over-pivotal-senate-races>.

⁵¹ Sean Collins, "Sen. Kelly Loeffler Has Tested Positive for the Coronavirus," Vox (Vox, November 22, 2020), <https://www.vox.com/2020/11/22/21589645/kelly-loeffler-positive-coronavirus-georgia-runoff>.

⁵² Darragh Roche, "Kelly Loeffler Accused of Violating Senate Ethics Rules with Fundraising Appeal in Federal Building," Newsweek (Newsweek, November 19, 2020), <https://www.newsweek.com/kelly-loeffler-accused-violating-senate-ethics-rules-fundraising-federal-building-1548595>.

Collins and herself may cause less enthusiasm among Collins voters to turn out for Loeffler in the runoff.

Still, Warnock appears to be at an apparent disadvantage compared to Loeffler. In the weeks after the initial election, Republicans have out-fundraised Warnock, and without Collins in the race, the campaign now has to fight against more negative attack ads directed at him.⁵³ So far, Warnock has responded not by issuing strong attack ads against Loeffler's policies in return, but rather by running ads calling out Loeffler's attacks on him as being false smears and an attempt to buy her senate seat.

Warnock also faces challenges in turning out enough voters. The margin during the November election was razor-thin, but historically, Democratic candidates have received lower turnout from their base in runoff elections than their Republican counterparts.⁵⁴ Warnock will have to work to maintain the high Democratic enthusiasm from the Presidential election and hope that the motivation to potentially flip the senate will carry Warnock over the top.

At this stage, the Georgia special election still seems to be a toss-up. In a normal election year, Loeffler would be undeniably favored due to an early fundraising boost and historically higher Republican turnout. However, because of the chaos surrounding the Presidential election and historically high Democratic enthusiasm, we could potentially see a combination of lower than usual Republican turnout and higher than usual Democratic turnout that would put Warnock over the edge to come away with a victory. In any case, whoever ultimately wins the Georgia

⁵³ David Morgan, "Baptism by Fire: Georgia Democratic Challenger Warnock Faces First TV Attack in Crucial U.S. Senate Race," Reuters (Thomson Reuters, November 12, 2020), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-senate-georgia/baptism-by-fire-georgia-Democratic-challenger-warnock-faces-first-tv-attack-in-crucial-u-s-senate-race-idUSKBN27S356>.

⁵⁴ Jacob Rubashkin, "Georgia Runoff History: Why the Past May Not Be Prologue," Site, November 19, 2020, <https://www.insideelections.com/news/article/georgia-runoff-history-why-the-past-may-not-be-prologue>.

special election will most likely be whoever does a better job at turning out their party's base and maintaining voter enthusiasm from the general election.

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