

Inside Elections

with
Nathan L. Gonzales
Nonpartisan Analysis

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Georgia Senate: Between the Parties

By Jacob Rubashkin

Republicans need a net gain of just one seat to take back control of the U.S. Senate and, on paper, Georgia appears the likeliest candidate to deliver the majority back to the GOP.

All of Republicans' pickup opportunities are in states Joe Biden carried in 2020, but Georgia was the narrowest of Biden's victories — just a 0.23 percent win — in the entire country.

And the GOP sees Democratic incumbent Raphael Warnock as an accidental senator, only in Washington because of a long string of happenstances and mishaps: the unexpected resignation of Sen. Johnny Isakson in 2019 that triggered a special election, the decision by Gov. Brian Kemp to go against President Donald Trump's wishes when making a temporary appointment to Isakson's seat, the aggressive and distracting campaign waged by Trump's preferred replacement (Rep. Doug Collins) against Kemp's pick (businesswoman Kelly Loeffler) that consumed GOP resources and attention all of 2020, Georgia's unique special election laws, and finally, Trump's fact-free insistence that the election in Georgia was rigged against him.

In 2022, with Trump out of office, Republicans hope the story in Georgia will be different.

But the former president has remained laser-focused on the Peach State. Not only has Trump continued to cast doubt on the legitimacy of Georgia's election system, he is determined to cleave the Georgia GOP in two by trying to push out the incumbent governor, lieutenant governor, and secretary of state.

And Trump used his de facto position as the head of the Republican Party to effectively clear the way for his preferred candidate, football legend Herschel Walker, to be the party's Senate nominee, despite Walker's political inexperience and massive personal baggage and the strenuous objections of much of the GOP establishment.

This creates the possibility that Republicans could see a golden opportunity to win a Senate seat slip away because Trump's priorities are different than those of Republicans focused on winning back the Senate.

The Lay of the Land

Georgia is a recent but long-expected addition to the short list of swing states. Biden was the first Democrat to win the state since Bill Clinton in 1992, narrowly edging out Trump, 49.5-49.2 percent, and with the highest percentage of the vote since the Peach State's own Jimmy Carter in 1980.

Biden's victory last November was followed up by Democrats' stunning victories in the two U.S. Senate races that went to Jan. 5, 2021

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2022 Senate Ratings

BATTLEGROUND

Democratic-Held (4)

Cortez Masto (D-Nev.)
Hassan (D-N.H.)
Kelly (D-Ariz.)
Warnock (D-Ga.)

Republican-Held (4)

NC Open (Burr, R)
PA Open (Toomey, R)
Johnson (R-Wisc.)
Rubio (R-Fl.)

Solid Democratic (10)

VT Open (Leahy, D)
Bennet (D-Colo.)
Blumenthal (D-Conn.)
Duckworth (D-Ill.)
Murray (D-Wash.)
Padilla (D-Calif.)
Schatz (D-Hawaii)
Schumer (D-N.Y.)
Van Hollen (D-Md.)
Wyden (D-Ore.)

Solid Republican (16)

AL Open (Shelby, R)
MO Open (Blunt, R)
OH Open (Portman, R)
Boozman (R-Ark.)
Crapo (R-Idaho)
Grassley (R-Iowa)
Hoeven (R-N.D.)
Kennedy (R-La.)
Lankford (R-Okla.)
Lee (R-Utah)
Moran (R-Kan.)
Murkowski (R-Alaska)
Paul (R-Ky.)
Scott (R-S.C.)
Thune (R-S.D.)
Young (R-Ind.)

CALENDAR

Dec. 13	Texas Candidate Filing Deadline
Dec. 15	California Redistricting Deadline
Dec. 17	North Carolina Candidate Filing Deadline
Jan. 10	College Football Championship
Jan. 11	Florida's 20th District Special General Election
Jan. 28	Alabama Candidate Filing Deadline
Jan. 29	West Virginia Candidate Filing Deadline

Report Shorts

Georgia Governor

Former state House minority leader / 2018 Democratic gubernatorial nominee Stacey Abrams made her long-anticipated 2022 gubernatorial bid official on Dec. 1, putting her on the path for an epic rematch of the 2018 race that pitted her against now-Gov. Brian Kemp in a race decided by 1 point, 50-49 percent, in the Republican's favor. That is if Kemp can win the renomination despite consistent attacks by former President Donald Trump, who blames the governor for not voiding Joe Biden's victory in the Peach State last year. Kemp currently faces a primary challenge from former Democratic state Rep. Vernon Jones, who now fashions himself as a Trump conservative. More dangerous for Kemp is former GOP Sen. David Perdue, who lost a narrow re-election runoff earlier this year. Perdue is being encouraged by Trump to challenge the governor in the primary, but it's not clear he'll go for it.

Massachusetts Governor

Charlie Baker, the popular two-term Republican governor of the deeply Democratic Bay State, announced he would not seek a third term, imperiling the GOP's hold on governor's mansion. Baker's lieutenant governor, Karyn Polito also took her name out of contention. That leaves former state Rep. Geoff Diehl, who lost the 2018 Senate race to Elizabeth Warren by 24 points, as the only major GOP candidate. Diehl is endorsed by former President Trump and has said the 2020 election was rigged.

On the Democratic side, several candidates are already running, including decorated Harvard political science professor Danielle Allen, state Sen. Sonia Chang-Diaz, and former state Sen. Benjamin Dowling, but the field will almost certainly grow larger.

State Attorney General Maura Healey, who has already expressed interest in running, would be an early frontrunner. Secretary of Labor / former Boston Mayor Marty Walsh and 2021 Boston mayoral election runner-up Anissa Essaibi George are both reportedly looking at the race. And former Rep. Joe Kennedy III, who lost a primary challenge to Sen. Ed Markey last year, has to be mentioned.

Even though 2022 is shaping up to be a good year for Republicans, Baker (or perhaps Polito) was the best shot the GOP had at keeping this seat. For now, it moves out of Solid Republican and onto the Battleground, but it will likely move further toward Democrats.

Pennsylvania Senate

The GOP primary to succeed retiring Sen. Pat Toomey hit a hard reset when Trump-endorsed frontrunner Sean Parnell dropped out after

2022 Governor Ratings

Battleground

Democratic-held (6)

PA Open (Wolf, D)
Kelly (D-Kan.)
Mills (D-Maine)
Whitmer (D-Mich.)
Sisolak (D-Nev.)
Evers (D-Wisc.)

Republican-held (6)

AZ Open (Ducey, R)
MA Open (Baker, R)#
MD Open (Hogan, R)
DeSantis (R-Fl.)
Kemp (R-Ga.)
Sununu (R-N.H.)

Solid Democratic (10)

HI Open (Ige, D)
OR Open (Brown, D)
Newsom (D-Calif.)
Polis (D-Colo.)
Lamont (D-Conn.)
Pritzker (D-Ill.)
Walz (D-Minn.)
Lujan Grisham (D-N.M.)
Hochul (D-N.Y.)
McKee (D-R.I.)

Solid Republican (14)

AR Open (Hutchinson, R)
NE Open (Ricketts, R)
Ivey (R-Ala.)
Dunleavy (R-Alaska)
Little (R-Idaho)
Reynolds (R-Iowa)
Noem (R-S.D.)
DeWine (R-Ohio)
Stitt (R-Okla.)
McMaster (R-S.C.)
Lee (R-Tenn.)
Abbott (R-Texas)
Scott (R-Vt.)
Gordon (R-Wyo.)

*Takeovers in Italics, # moved benefiting Democrats, * moved benefiting Republicans*

losing custody of his children in a divorce battle that also saw his ex-wife accuse him of abuse. Wealthy developer Jeff Bartos, former Ambassador to Denmark Carla Sands, and 2020 4th District House nominee Kathy Barnette are still running, but much of the media attention has surrounded the recent entry of TV host Dr. Mehmet Oz, the celebrity doctor. Oz lives in North Jersey and only lived in Pennsylvania while in medical school several decades ago, but says he has moved to the state.

Oz may earn eyerolls for his celebrity, the accusations of quackery that follow him and his tenuous-at-best connection to the state, but he shouldn't be dismissed. He'll bring high initial name ID to a field of unknowns, he has the resources to self-fund if necessary, and his medical background could be appealing to voters, especially those unfamiliar with his controversies. He also has a long relationship with fellow TV showman Donald Trump, who appeared on his show during the 2016 presidential campaign and who appointed Oz to a presidential commission. **IE**

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Nonpartisan Analysis



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Biden's Job Rating Tumbles from Stable

By Ryan Matsumoto

Earlier this year, *Inside Elections* took a look at Joe Biden's presidential approval rating and noted its remarkable stability. As of June 1, Biden's approval rating was at 54 percent approval and 40 percent disapproval in the FiveThirtyEight polling average. Biden's approval rating had hovered at about that level since the beginning of his presidency in January, while his disapproval rating had ticked up a few points but plateaued at around 40 percent in the spring.

What a difference six months makes.

As of December 1, Biden's approval rating was at 42 percent approval and 52 percent disapproval in the FiveThirtyEight polling average.

Looking back, the first inflection point was in early summer as cases of the Delta variant started appearing across the country. As of June 15, Biden's approval rating was still fairly healthy at 53 percent approval and 41 percent disapproval. But over the next few months, it got steadily worse as coronavirus cases started surging again. By August 15, Biden's approval rating had fallen to 50 percent approval and 44 percent disapproval. This decline in Biden's overall standing tracks well with a substantial decline in his approval rating on handling the pandemic.

The second inflection point was in mid-August when the Taliban took over Afghanistan following the departure of America's troops. While the president was 6 points above water on August 15, his approval rating quickly dropped to net even at 47 percent on August 26. While worsening pandemic conditions may have catalyzed a steady decline in Biden's approval rating, the situation in Afghanistan likely made a big impact as well.

One hope Democrats had was that Biden's approval rating would rebound fairly quickly once Afghanistan faded away from voters' consciousness. After all, President Barack Obama's approval rating temporarily improved after the operation that killed Osama Bin Laden in May 2011, but quickly returned to its baseline as attention returned to domestic issues. But this wasn't the case for Biden. His approval rating dipped into negative territory at the end of August and continued to get worse throughout the fall.

One reason why Biden's approval rating may be continuing to flounder is inflation. Per a recent Fox News national poll, inflation and rising prices topped the list of economic concerns at 45 percent, ahead of government spending and the deficit (15 percent), jobs and employment (15 percent), income inequality (13 percent), and taxes (4 percent). Additionally, 73 percent of registered voters reported that recent increases in grocery prices had caused financial hardship for themselves and their families. Similarly, 72 percent of registered voters said that recent increases in gas prices had caused them financial hardship.

And while Democrats hoped that passing the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act would improve Biden's job rating by making him look more competent, there doesn't seem to be any evidence yet that it's had an impact on his numbers. Since November 5, the day the infrastructure bill was passed, Biden's approval rating has gone from 43 percent to 42 percent. It's possible that Democrats may benefit politically from the infrastructure bill down the road, or from the potential passage of the even larger Build Back Better plan, but it hasn't had the type of immediate impact many were hoping for.

Since January, Biden's net approval rating has declined from about 17 percentage points above water to 9 points below water. However, this type of decline isn't without historical precedent -- presidents often lose a substantial amount of political standing in their first year. Donald Trump's presidential approval rating declined from 4 percentage points above water in January to 18 points below water in December. And Obama's presidential approval rating declined from about 50 points above water in January to 7 points above water in December.

The drop in Biden's job rating suggests that even in an age of political polarization, many of the typical trends in American politics have continued to prevail. In addition to the president losing ground as he exits his honeymoon period, another key trend held this year as the party without control of the presidency won the Virginia gubernatorial election.

As *Inside Elections'* Nathan Gonzales has noted, the party in the White House has lost Senate seats in 18 of the past 25 midterm elections and House seats in 22 of 25 midterm elections in the past 100 years. For Democrats to maintain control of Congress, they must buck historical trends in a major way. But so far, historical trends seem to be holding: Biden's approval rating has declined and Republicans outperformed by double-digits in both the Virginia and New Jersey gubernatorial elections. Given Democrats' narrow majorities in both the House and Senate, that's good news for Republicans looking to take back control of Congress next year.

IE

2022 House Ratings

Due to delays in the redistricting process, ratings are incomplete. New ratings and states will be added on a rolling basis as final maps are approved in each state.

Toss-Up (3D)

CO 8 (Open, New)
IA 3 (Axne, D)

ME 2 (Golden, D)
NC 2 (Open; Butterfield, D)

Tilt Democratic

Tilt Republican (1D)

TX 15 (Open; Gonzalez, D)

Lean Democratic (1D)

NV 3 (Lee, D)

Lean Republican (1R)

NE 2 (Bacon, R)

Likely Democratic (6D)

CO 7 (Perlmutter, D)
NV 1 (Titus, D)
NV 4 (Horsford, D)
OR 4 (Open; DeFazio, D)
OR 5 (Schrader, D)
OR 6 (Open, New)
TX 28 (Cuellar, D)

Likely Republican (4R, 1D)

CO 3 (Boebers, R)
IA 1 (Miller-Meeks, R)
IA 2 (Hinson, R)
MT 1 (Open, New)
NC 11 (Manning, D/Fox, R)
NC 4 (Open, New)
TX 23 (Gonzales, R)

moved benefiting Democrats, * moved benefiting Republicans Takeovers in Italics

Montana Redistricting: Back To the Future

By Jacob Rubashkin

When Montana was assigned an additional congressional district earlier this year, it didn't just double its representation in the U.S. House. It made history, with Big Sky Country becoming the first state ever to bounce back to multiple members after previously being reduced to one at-large district.

Montana lost its second House district after the 1990 Census. But two decades of population growth — fueled in large part by West Coast transplants — led the state to reclaim its second district following the 2020 Census.

An independent commission, made up of two Democratic appointees, two Republican appointees, and one tie-breaking chairperson appointed by the state Supreme Court, was charged with drawing the state's new congressional map.

As expected, all of the maps seriously considered by the commission picked up the 20th century tradition of dividing the state into an eastern district and a western district.

The western half of the state has long been friendlier to Democrats than the eastern half. Heading into the process, the biggest unknown was just how favorable to Democrats the new western district would be.

Republicans were incensed when the state Supreme Court selected tribal attorney Maylinn Smith to be the commission's chairwoman, decrying her as a biased partisan because she had previously donated money to Democratic candidates. But in the end, Smith cast her tie-breaking vote for the map proposed by the commission's Republican members, rather than the Democratic-proposed alternative.

That map was formally adopted on Nov. 12. It creates a solidly Republican district in the east, and a more divided district in the west. Given that Republicans will likely enjoy a good political environment in 2022, the western district may not be immediately competitive, but could be a pickup opportunity for Democrats later in the decade.

1st District

The new 1st District occupies Western Montana, the mountainous region west of the Continental Divide. It spans the entire border with Idaho and at its northern end it extends eastward through Glacier County and the parts of Pondera County that house the Blackfeet Indian Reservation.

From there it cuts back westward, to the left of Lewis and Clark and Jefferson counties. That means it includes neither Helena, the state capital, nor Great Falls, both constituencies where Democrats can overperform.

Finally, the district swoops back eastward to pick up Gallatin County, home of Bozeman, the burgeoning tech hub that accounts for much of the state's growth over the past decade.

The unadopted Democratic proposal would have put Helena and Park County — the Democratic-friendly northern entrance to Yellowstone National Park — in the western district as well.

Politically, the new 1st District leans Republican, but by about 9 points less than the state as a whole. In 2020, President Donald Trump would have carried it by 7 points, 52-45 percent, compared to his 57-41 percent statewide margin (under the Democratic proposal, it would have backed Trump by just under 4 points). In last year's Senate race, incumbent Republican Steve Daines would have just narrowly eked out a 1.2-point win over Democrat Steve Bullock despite winning by 10 points statewide. And according to calculations from my colleague Bradley Wascher, Republican Matt Rosendale would have carried the new 1st

Rating Montana's New Congressional Districts

DISTRICT	INCUMBENT	INITIAL RATING
1st	OPEN	Likely Republican
2nd	Matt Rosendale, R	Solid Republican

District by 5 points in the 2020 House race.

But in 2018, Democratic Sen. Jon Tester would have carried it by 11 points, 54-43 percent, while winning statewide by 3 points, and Bullock would have won it by 9 points, 53-44 percent, in the 2016 gubernatorial contest.

Three Democrats are running for the seat: nonprofit executive Cora Neumann, attorney / 2020 Public Service Commission nominee Monica Tranel, and former state Rep. Tom Winter. A fourth, state Rep. Laurie Bishop, dropped out of the race after her home was not included in the final map.

Neumann, who briefly ran for Senate in 2020 but dropped out when Bullock entered the race, is the fundraising leader and had \$475,000 in the bank on Sept. 30. Tranel is a former Olympic rower who has an endorsement from former Gov. Brian Schweitzer, and had \$150,000 in the bank. Winter previously ran for the state's at-large seat but lost the Democratic primary by a 79-point landslide. He joined the race after the latest FEC filing deadline.

On the Republican side, the frontrunner is former Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, who previously held Montana's at-large seat from 2015 to 2017, when he joined Trump's cabinet. Zinke will face former state Sen. Al Olszewski but is heavily favored. Olszewski, an orthopedic surgeon, recently placed last in GOP primaries for Senate (in 2018) and governor (in 2020), and Zinke has an endorsement from former President Trump.

Montana has a history of split-ticket voting, Zinke has some vulnerabilities stemming from ethics issues while a cabinet secretary and residency questions, and Democrats have good candidate options. In a neutral political environment, this district would be a potential pickup opportunity for Democrats. But with the winds favoring Republicans next year, Democrats will face an uphill climb in any constituency that voted for Trump last year, let alone by 7 points. That's why this district begins as Likely Republican.

2nd District

The new 2nd District occupies the eastern, more rural and less mountainous part of the state. Current at-large Rep. Matt Rosendale, who lives in Glendive County toward the North Dakota border, is running in this district.

In 2020, when he was running statewide for the at-large district, Rosendale would have carried the new 2nd District by 25 points.

In 2022, he should win easily. Trump would have carried this newly-drawn district 62-35 percent in 2020, so any vulnerability for the former state auditor would come in a GOP primary. Unlike many other members who see their district borders changed, Rosendale already represents all of his new district, so he's not taking in any new territory from which a potential competitor could emerge. Trump endorsed Rosendale, likely clearing his path to a second term. This district is Solid Republican, where it will likely stay through Election Day.



Nevada Redistricting: Democrats Go Gambling

By Jacob Rubashkin

On Nov. 16, Nevada Gov. Steve Sisolak signed his state's new congressional maps into law. The map was drawn and passed by the Democratic-controlled state legislature and signed by Sisolak, also a Democrat, the same day.

In the 10 years Nevada has had four congressional districts, Republicans have held a 3-1 advantage, the delegation has been split 2-2, and Democrats have held a 3-1 advantage as they do now. Neither party has ever held all four at once — befitting for a state so evenly divided.

But that could change in 2022 because of a gamble Democrats are taking.

Nevada Democrats have “unpacked” the Las Vegas-based 1st District, in an effort to ease the re-election efforts of Reps. Susie Lee and Steven Horsford, whose 3rd and 4th districts sit to the south and north of Las Vegas, respectively. Because many of the 1st's Democratic voters have been parceled out to its two neighbors, the district will be competitive for the first time in a decade.

That means that none of the state's four seats will be rated Solid Democratic heading into what looks to be a brutal cycle for Democrats, and creates the possibility that Republicans could sweep all four districts. A status quo map would have preserved at least one Democratic seat.

It's not yet clear how bad 2022 will be for Democrats, and the new map does create three seats Biden carried by at least 7 points in a state that Biden only carried by 2 points, giving all three Democratic incumbents decent starting positions.

But in a politically temperamental state such as Nevada, Democrats could be tempting fate at an inopportune moment when a loss of just five seats will cost them the House majority.

1st District

The 1st is the most radically altered of the state's four districts. Under the old map, the 1st was a compact rectangle centered directly on the Las Vegas strip, which it fully encompassed.

It spanned just a few miles east to west (from the Clark County Wetlands to Spring Valley) and south to north (from McCarran Airport to North Las Vegas).

In its previous form, the 1st was Solid Democratic, voting for Biden 61-36 percent in 2020, for Democratic Sen. Jacky Rosen 64-32 percent in 2018, and Hillary Clinton 62-33 percent in 2016.

But Democratic Rep. Dina Titus drew the redistricting short stick, and the new map unpacks Las Vegas, spreading its Democratic voters across the 1st, 3rd, and 4th districts.

The new version of the 1st loses its entire western half, with Spring Valley shifting to the 3rd District and the Twin Lakes area shifting to the 4th District. The new 1st also picks up some of Sunrise Manor from the

4th District, and Republican-leaning Henderson and Boulder City from the 3rd District.

As a result, the new 1st would have voted for Biden by just 9 points, instead of the 25-point advantage he had under the old lines. Rosen would have carried it by 13 points (down from 32 points) and Hillary Clinton by 10 points (down from 29 points).

The new district is also plurality white, while the old district was plurality Hispanic. Back in 2012, when the district was redrawn to be

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House Members Not Seeking Re-election

Thus far, 19 Democrats and 11 Republicans are running for another office or leaving Congress entirely

	Current District	Member
DEMOCRATS	Arizona's 2nd	Ann Kirkpatrick
	California's 14th	Jackie Speier
	California's 37th	Karen Bass
	Florida's 10th	Val Demings
	Florida's 13th	Charlie Crist
	Illinois' 17th	Cheri Bustos
	Kentucky's 3rd	John Yarmuth
	Maryland's 4th	Anthony Brown
	New York's 3rd	Thomas Suozzi
	North Carolina's 1st	G.K. Butterfield
	North Carolina's 4th	David Price
	Ohio's 13th	Tim Ryan
	Oregon's 4th	Peter DeFazio
	Pennsylvania's 17th	Conor Lamb
	Pennsylvania's 18th	Mike Doyle
	Texas' 30th	Eddie Bernice Johnson
	Texas' 34th	Filemon Vela
	Vermont's At-Large	Peter Welch
	Wisconsin's 3rd	Ron Kind
REPUBLICANS	Alabama's 5th	Mo Brooks
	Georgia's 10th	Jody Hice
	Illinois 16th	Adam Kinzinger
	Missouri's 4th	Vicky Hartzler
	Missouri's 7th	Billy Long
	New York's 1st	Lee Zeldin
	New York's 23rd	Tom Reed
	North Carolina's 13th	Ted Budd
	Ohio's 16th	Anthony Gonzalez
	Texas' 1st	Louie Gohmert
	Texas' 8th	Kevin Brady



Dina Titus

Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call

Continued from page 5

plurality Hispanic, many Democrats hoped it would elect Nevada's first Hispanic representative. Instead, it was Titus who boxed out state Sen. Ruben Kihuen, an immigrant from Mexico, in the primary (Kihuen would still be Nevada's first Hispanic representative, winning the 4th district four years later but leaving office two years later under a cloud of scandal).

Titus currently has one primary challenger, progressive Amy Vilela, who ran for the 4th District in 2018. Vilela garnered just 9 percent in that race but was featured in the documentary *Knocking Down the House* alongside now-Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and in 2020 Vilela was a co-chair of Sen. Bernie Sanders' Nevada campaign. But Vilela's chances will take a hit now that Hispanic voting power in the district is diluted.

Two Republicans are running: former Trump campaign staffer Carolina Serrano, and retired Army Col. Mark Robertson. Titus should be secure in the next general election, but if the national environment gets worse for Democrats, she could be in a competitive race for the first time since 2010. If that happens, Democrats are in danger of getting swept out of the delegation entirely because they'll no longer have one Vegas-based district to rely on. Likely Democratic.

2nd District

The lone GOP-held district in the state remains largely unchanged. It



Mark Amodei

occupies the northern third of the state, and includes Carson City and Reno. The most notable change is the addition of vast but largely unpopulated White Pine County, previously in the 4th District. Under the new lines the 2nd

would have voted for Trump by 11 points, 54-43 percent, compared to 53-43 percent under the old lines.

Rep. Mark Amodei had a cancer scare earlier in the year, and considered running for governor against Sisolak, but decided to run for re-election instead. He won his last election 57-41 percent. Democrats are increasingly focused on Washoe County, which makes up two-thirds of the district, but won't be winning this district anytime soon. Solid Republican.

3rd District

The main beneficiary of Nevada's redistricting is Democratic Rep.

Susie Lee, whose 3rd District will get substantially more Democratic. For the past decade, the 3rd has encompassed the southern parts of Las Vegas and everything below it, a mix of ritzy areas such as Summerlin South, a major city



Susie Lee

Rating Nevada's New Congressional Districts

DISTRICT	INCUMBENT	INITIAL RATING
1st	Dina Titus, D	Likely Democratic
2nd	Mark Amodei, R	Solid Republican
3rd	Susie Lee, D	Lean Democratic
4th	Steven Horsford, D	Likely Democratic

(Henderson) and rural desert towns. According to *Daily Kos Elections*, it was one of just five congressional districts in the country to vote for Obama in 2012, Trump in 2016, and Biden in 2020, underscoring how consistently divided the electorate is.

Under the old lines, the 3rd voted for Trump by 1 point, 48-47 percent, in 2016, and for Biden by 0.2 points, 49.1-48.9 percent, in 2020. Lee won her first election in 2018 by 9 points against perennial candidate Danny Tarkanian, but won her second term by just 3 points, 49-46 percent, in 2020 against former pro wrestler Dan Rodimer.

Under the new lines, the 3rd sheds Henderson and Boulder City to the 1st, and picks up parts of Las Vegas rich with Democratic votes. The new district would have voted for Biden by a slightly more robust 7 points, and for Rosen in 2018 by 12 points (compared to 3 points under the old map).

That gives Lee a bit of breathing room, though if the national environment continues to sour for Democrats, she could be in danger. Three Republicans are already running, including attorney April Becker, who narrowly lost a state Senate race last year and has House GOP Conference Chairwoman Elise Stefanik's endorsement. Lean Democratic.

4th District

Democratic Rep. Steven Horsford's central Nevada and North



Steven Horsford

Las Vegas district was tweaked at the Las Vegas margins, shedding Summerlin to the 3rd District, and trading away some of Sunrise Manor to the 1st District in exchange for Democratic areas around Twin Lakes.

Under the old lines, Biden carried the 4th District by 4 points, 51-47 percent. Under the new lines, that margin would double to 53-45 percent.

Horsford, who previously represented the 4th District from 2012 to 2014, won his seat back in 2018 by 8 points, 52-44 percent. In 2020, he turned back Republican Jim Marchant, 51-46 percent. The mid-race revelation of an earlier affair with a Senate staffer did not seem to hinder his campaign.

Sam Peters, a Republican Air Force veteran who placed second in the GOP primary for this seat last year, is running again.

Horsford is no stranger to tough cycles, and he'll enter 2022 with the partisan lean of the district in his favor and a substantial financial advantage. But depending on how bad things get for Democrats, this district could start looking more vulnerable. Likely Democratic.

Continued from page 1

runoffs after no candidate in either received a majority of the vote. In the regularly-scheduled race, Democrat Jon Ossoff ousted incumbent Republican David Perdue, 50.6-49.4 percent, in the runoff election, after trailing Perdue 49.7-47.9 percent in the first round.

And in the special election to fill out Sen. Johnny Isakson's term, Warnock defeated appointed-Sen. Kelly Loeffler, 51-49 percent, after outpacing her 33-26 percent in a first round that featured 20 candidates on the ballot. Ossoff and Warnock's wins gave Democrats control of the Senate once Vice President Kamala Harris took office, and with it full control of Congress and the White House for the first time since 2010.

The three victories are the end result of two decades of progress for Democrats. Georgia voted for George W. Bush by 12 and 16 points in 2000 and 2004, for John McCain by 5 points in 2008, and for Mitt Romney by 7 points in 2012.

In 2014, Democrats ran an all-scion ticket of Jason Carter (the former president's grandson) for governor and Michelle Nunn (daughter of the former senator Sam Nunn) for Senate, but both lost by 8 points. And in 2016, Trump won by 5 points while Isakson won by 14 points.

In 2018, Democrat Stacey Abrams narrowly lost the gubernatorial race, 50-49 percent, to Republican Brian Kemp in one of the most closely watched races of the cycle.

Democrats' recent victories are a result of the state's rapidly shifting racial demographics and population distribution. From 2010 to 2020, the state's population dropped from nearly 60 percent White to just 50.1 percent. While some of that is due to changes in how the Census records people of multiple races, Georgia saw its Black population and Asian population increase significantly. The state has also become increasingly urban and suburban. As many of the rural counties saw their populations decline over the last decade, Atlanta and the surrounding counties grew at a rate nearly double the state as a whole. Combined with the leftward shift of the suburbs, those changes allowed Democrats to start winning in Georgia again, albeit with a very different coalition than the one that powered Zell Miller — the conservative who was previously the last Democrat to win a Georgia Senate race — to victory in 2000.

The Democratic Incumbent

Warnock, 52, was a first-time candidate when he threw his hat into the ring for Senate last year, but he was no stranger to politics. The senior pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church, where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once held the pulpit, Warnock was heavily involved in protest movements surrounding the state's decision not to expand Medicaid in the early 2010s. Warnock is a Savannah native who attended Morehouse College before earning an M.Div., M.Phil., and Ph.D. from Union Theological Seminary.

Warnock passed on the 2016 Senate race. Then, in 2019, Isakson announced he would resign for health reasons, opening up his seat for a 2020 special election, one that would coincide with the regularly scheduled election for the state's other seat. Abrams passed on a run, as did Rep. Lucy McBath, and Democrats turned their attention to wooing Warnock.

In the all-party jungle primary election, Warnock began a distant third or fourth, behind appointed-Sen. Loeffler, Rep. Doug Collins, both Republicans, and even Democrat Matt Lieberman, the son of the former Connecticut senator.

But with Loeffler and the GOP establishment preoccupied with fending off Collins, Warnock was able to roll out a positive campaign

on his own terms, and finished in first place with 33 percent, ahead of Loeffler (26 percent) and Collins (20 percent).

In the runoff that saw more than half a billion dollars in advertising, Republicans attacked Warnock as a radical, anti-American ideologue and mined his decades of sermons for unflattering clips that were often presented without context.



Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

Raphael Warnock

But Warnock was able to defuse those attacks with lighthearted ads as well as more serious, personal spots, and also go after Loeffler for concerns about her stock trades.

During the runoff, Trump repeatedly claimed that Georgia's

elections were rigged, and took aim at the state's Republican secretary of state. That likely depressed GOP turnout on Jan. 5, when Republican-leaning areas saw a steeper dropoff in turnout from the general election to the runoff than Democratic counties did. Warnock won by 2 points, 51-49 percent, and was sworn in on Jan. 20.

In the Senate, Warnock sits on the Agriculture, Commerce, and Banking committees. Warnock's campaign team includes manager Quentin Fulks, media consultant Adam Magnus of Magnus Pearson, and pollster Mike Bocian of GBAO Strategies.

The Republican Challengers

Five Republicans are currently running for the GOP nomination: former Univ. of Georgia/NFL running back Herschel Walker, state Agriculture Commissioner Gary Black, banking executive/former Navy SEAL Latham Saddler, businessman Kelvin King, and former state Rep. Josh Clark.

Walker, 59, was encouraged to run by Trump, with whom he has a long relationship dating back to Walker's time playing for Trump's New Jersey Generals in the ill-fated USFL. Born in Augusta and raised in Wrightsville, Walker rose to national prominence in the early 1980s as a running back for the University of Georgia, where he was one of the most accomplished college players of all time, winning a national championship and the 1982 Heisman Trophy.

After his junior year, he left college to join the USFL's Generals (he received his degree a year later), and when the USFL folded, Walker was drafted by the NFL's Dallas Cowboys. A long and winding NFL career followed, one that included pro bowl seasons in Dallas, an infamous trade to the Minnesota Vikings, a turn as a bobsledder in the 1992 Olympics for Team USA (he finished 7th), and stints in Philadelphia, New York, and again in Dallas where he retired in 1997. After football, Walker briefly competed in mixed martial arts and now runs a poultry company based in Dallas, where he lived for 25 years before moving back to Georgia to run for Senate.

Walker has been diagnosed with dissociative identity disorder (previously known as multiple personality disorder), which he wrote about in a 2008 book.

Walker's ex-wife, Cindy Grossman, has accused him of repeatedly threatening to kill her, including an incident in which he held a gun to her head and another in which he held a straight razor to her throat and then choked her until she passed out. After their divorce, Grossman received

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a protective order against Walker after she said he threatened to kill her and her new boyfriend; the court also confiscated a gun from Walker. And according to a police report from 2012, another woman made similar accusations against Walker in Dallas while in a relationship with him.

Walker's general consultant is Heath Garrett of Strategic Partners & Media.

Black, 63, has served as Georgia's Agriculture Commissioner for the past decade. Prior to that, the 1980 graduate of University of Georgia and Commerce, Ga. resident was a cattle farmer and the president of the Georgia Agribusiness Council, a trade association and lobbying group.

In 2006, Black ran for agriculture commissioner, winning 42 percent of the vote in the first round of the GOP primary; in second place was then-state Sen. Brian Kemp with 27 percent. In the primary runoff, Black defeated Kemp, 60-40 percent, but in the general election, Black lost to nine-term incumbent Democrat Tommy Irvin, 56-41 percent.

In 2010, Irvin retired and Black ran again. This time he easily won the primary, 76-24 percent, and general, 56-40 percent. In 2014, he won re-election against Irvin's grandson Chris, 58-42 percent. And in 2018, Black turned back Democrat Fred Swann 53-47 percent. While it was Black's closest win, it also made him the best-performing Republican on the statewide ticket in Georgia that year.

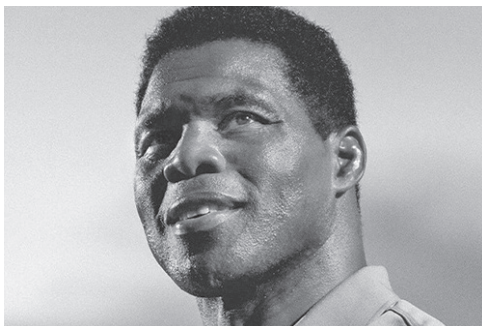
Saddler, 38, most recently worked as an executive at Columbus-based financial services firm Synovus. But it's his foreign policy experience that the Atlanta native and former UGA student body president (Class of 2005) is focusing on. After several years at IBM and masters degrees from the University of Maryland and Georgia Tech, Saddler joined the Navy SEALs in 2011, deploying to Afghanistan and Iraq. His final posting on active duty was as an aide on the National Security Council from 2017 to 2018 under President Trump. He then spent a year as a White House fellow, from 2018 to 2019 before returning to Georgia in 2020.

King, 47, was born in Macon and owns a Marietta-based construction company. A 1996 graduate of the Air Force Academy who worked in contracting for a decade before founding his company Osprey Management in 2012, King was a prominent African-American supporter of Trump during the 2020 election and spoke at several of the then-president's events. King is the only candidate thus far even partially self-funding; he loaned his campaign \$300,000 earlier in the year.

The Republican Primary

Despite his substantial baggage, Walker begins as the overwhelming favorite for the GOP nomination. He has high name recognition and favorability ratings stemming from his status as a hometown sports legend, and at the moment looks well-positioned to avoid a runoff by eclipsing 50 percent of the vote in the first round of the primary on May 24.

Trump is Walker's biggest backer, but nearly as important is the belated support Walker earned from Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell.



Herschel Walker

Courtesy Walker Campaign

Before Walker entered the race, McConnell and his allies were openly expressing skepticism about the viability of his candidacy, with Texas Sen. John Cornyn telling *Politico* "I'd prefer to have somebody else," and McConnell confidante Josh Holmes sharing a report on allegations Walker threatened to kill his ex-wife and misled business partners and calling it "about as comprehensive a takedown as I've ever read."

That makes McConnell's turnaround and endorsement all the more remarkable, not so much because Georgia voters care what McConnell thinks, but because of the signal it sends to the GOP establishment.

It means Walker won't have to contend with outside spending from the McConnell-aligned Senate Leadership Fund, which has spent heavily in primaries when it feels a candidate would not be able to win a general election, and that donors should think twice before funding outside efforts akin to the one that helped bring down another Trump-backed Senate candidate facing accusations of domestic abuse in Pennsylvania.

To the extent that Walker faces intra-GOP competition, it comes from Black, the state agriculture commissioner. Republican strategists only have good things to say about King and Saddler, both of whom have attractive bios — Saddler as a charismatic veteran and King as a Black conservative in a rapidly changing state — and who could run for the House this year or later in the decade. But they aren't running particularly notable campaigns, are barely spending on digital advertising, and both have studiously avoided engaging Walker.

Not so for Black, the only statewide elected official in the race. The agriculture commissioner secured a few high-profile endorsements, including from former GOP Gov. Nathan Deal and former Rep./2020 Senate candidate Doug Collins, and he is also waging an aggressive campaign against Walker, whom he has decried as unelectable due to his violent past.

Black's campaign recently distributed "a trove of documents, including police reports and court records, to dozens of media outlets detailing accusations of violent behavior by Walker," according to the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, and held a campaign event at an anti-

domestic violence nonprofit.

But Black has not been a great fundraiser. He raised just \$1.2 million in his first six months in the race, less than Saddler pulled in over a similar period, and one-third of what Walker raised in just a month, and he hasn't



Latham Saddler

Courtesy Saddler Campaign

litigated his attacks on TV yet. Without much advertising, Black will have to rely on earned media to ding Walker. That's a tough sell for the mild-mannered 63-year-old cattle farmer, especially when he's competing for coverage with Walker's celebrity star power.

Limited early polling shows Walker with a massive advantage. An Aug. 11-12 poll of likely GOP voters by Tony Fabrizio for Trump's Save America PAC found Walker ahead with 54 percent of the vote, followed by Black (5 percent), King (2 percent), and Saddler (1 percent), with 35 percent undecided. A Sept. 2-4 poll of likely voters by GOP-leaning firm Trafalgar found Walker with 76 percent support, followed by Black (6 percent), Saddler (3 percent), and King (2 percent).

And an Oct. 11-14 poll of likely voters conducted by OnMessage Inc.

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for 34N22 Leadership (the pro-Walker Super PAC) also had Walker up with 76 percent, followed by Black (6 percent) and Saddler and King (both at 1 percent).

Republican strategists acknowledge the possibility that Walker, who is untested as a candidate, could do or say something erratic to derail his campaign, or that more damaging stories about his past could come out.

Black — and Saddler and King, to an extent — may be trying to position themselves to take advantage in that scenario. But if Walker implodes before the March 11 filing deadline, party strategists may not just default to the



Gary Black

people who were already running. Instead, they'll likely look to former Sens. Loeffler and Perdue (who may also run for governor) as well as Reps. Buddy Carter (who said he would have run for Senate if Walker hadn't), Drew Ferguson, and Austin Scott.

How It Plays Out

Warnock will enter 2022 as one of the most vulnerable Democratic incumbents in the country, by virtue of Georgia's evenly divided politics. And in the face of a potential GOP wave year, running in a state Biden carried by just over 11,000 votes is a tenuous spot, particularly after GOP performances in Virginia and New Jersey in 2021.

But unlike in other states with competitive Senate elections such as New Hampshire, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania, Georgia's politics are fairly inelastic, Democratic and Republican sources agree. With voting highly polarized by race, white voters making up just over 60 percent of the electorate, Biden's struggles with non-college educated white voters could have a more limited effect on Democrats' fortunes than elsewhere.

Both Warnock and his likely opponent, Walker, probably have high floors and low ceilings to their support.

Democrats put much of their faith in the organizing operation the party built up in the 2018 and 2020 elections, including efforts by Abrams and others to register hundreds of thousands of new voters, especially younger voters and voters of color. One Democrat pointed to the 5 percent of voters in the 2021 runoff who hadn't participated in the 2020 presidential election two months earlier as evidence of the party's ability to mobilize even the lowest propensity voters.

And several Democratic sources say that Warnock benefits from the hundreds of millions of dollars spent boosting his name ID and favorability rating last year. But the senator will have to educate voters on what he's done since he got into office. His campaign will focus on his bipartisan work with Republican senators, including efforts with Ted Cruz to fund a new interstate from Texas to Georgia, with Tim Scott of South Carolina to fund HBCUs, and with Tommy Tuberville of Alabama on trade. The campaign will also emphasize job creation, particularly in rural areas of the state.

Thus far, Walker has steered clear of outlining much specific policy other than broadly conservative notions of a smaller government and stronger military, preferring to talk about his upbringing and the adversity he's overcome in life. He's also avoided traditional media

availability, sticking to friendly interviews on Fox News, and likely won't participate in any primary debates.

That means he hasn't been directly pressed on the myriad accusations of violence and other malfeasance that have surfaced over the past year. Sooner or later he will have to answer those questions in person, and even some Republicans are unsure of how successful he'll be at that. Other GOP Senate strategists contend that Walker already addressed the necessary concerns in his 2008 book that discussed his mental illness, but the book did not deal with some of the most violent accusations from his ex-wife, or the more recent accusations made by an ex-girlfriend in 2012.

Both Democratic and Republican sources say most voters aren't aware of that side of Walker's history, and that he's still quite popular statewide, especially for a first-time candidate. For now, Democrats are content to let Walker's Republican opponents, such as Black, do the dirty work of assailing him on those issues. But at some point if Walker wins the GOP nomination, the party will unite behind him and Democrats will have to start going after Walker directly. That could be a delicate task for Democrats given the sensitive nature of domestic violence and mental illness. But Democratic strategists believe the paper trail of police reports and court documents is so damning that it will stand on its own in advertising (much of which may come from Super PACs, to create some distance between the negative attacks and Warnock).

Democratic and Republican operatives anticipate Warnock will have a spending advantage, fueled in large part by the massive list he compiled last year on the way to raising \$138 million. While he'll no longer have the benefit of being the only game in town like he was last time, he's already raised \$21.2 million since February, and had \$17.2 million in the bank on Sept. 30 (the third-most of any senator).

Walker's next fundraising report will indicate whether he can sustain the pace he set in his first month when he raised \$3.7 million and ended September with \$2.5 million in the bank. While Walker doesn't need to be at parity with Warnock to win, Republicans view Warnock's fundraising ability as his greatest asset, and neutralizing it with strong numbers from their own candidate would be a major coup.

That's the Ticket

With Abrams making her second bid for governor official, Democrats are excited about the prospect of an Abrams-Warnock duo at the top of the ticket, particularly as the party worries elsewhere about its voters being less enthusiastic about voting relative to Republicans. While turnout in the 2021 gubernatorial elections in New Jersey and Virginia was up all around, Republicans showed up in greater force than Democrats; the historic nature of Abrams' candidacy could help keep Democratic engagement high in Georgia, especially among the Black voters who powered Warnock to victory in the runoff.

Republicans are less sanguine about their gubernatorial pairing. Kemp is running for a second term but is detested by Trump, who blames him for not doing more to prevent Biden's win last year. Trump told Georgians at a rally earlier this year that "having [Abrams] might be better than having your existing governor," and "it's OK with me" if Abrams replaces Kemp.

That's worrying for some Georgia Republicans who believe that if Kemp is at the top of the ticket, Trump won't be able to stop himself from continuing to savage the governor in statements and at rallies, and that could depress GOP turnout similarly to how his comments depressed turnout in the 2021 Senate runoff.

Former Sen. Perdue is considering a primary challenge to Kemp,

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and has been encouraged to run by Trump. But Republicans are split on whether he will run at all, and according to several GOP sources in the state it's not at all clear Perdue would win a primary.

Despite those worries, Georgia has a low rate of ticket-splitting, so it's not at all clear that Kemp would drag down Walker, especially if Trump is campaigning heavily for the Senate nominee.

The Early Polling

Public polling of the race has been limited but consistently shows a competitive race between Warnock and Walker.

An Aug. 4-5 poll of 622 voters from Democratic firm Public Policy Polling found Warnock ahead of Walker, 48-46 percent, and ahead of Black, 46-38 percent. The poll also found Warnock's favorability even at 43 percent favorable/42 percent unfavorable, Walker's at 41/28 percent, and Black's at 15/15 percent.

And a Nov. 9 poll of 753 likely voters from Redfield & Wilton Strategies, a British firm with only a recent and middling record in American politics, found Warnock ahead of Walker, 48-42 percent.

Veteran GOP pollster Tony Fabrizio, whose polling in the 2021 runoff was quite accurate, recently conducted a battery of surveys for the pro-Trump MAGA committee in several swing states including Georgia. Fabrizio polled Trump vs. Biden, not Senate races, but it was notable that even as he found Biden down double digits against Trump in states such as Michigan and Wisconsin, he only found Biden down 3 points in Georgia.

Hypothetical presidential polling three years out is not particularly useful or predictive. But within the universe of Fabrizio's polls,

it is notable that the headwinds Biden faces in other swing states are dampened in Georgia. That could be an indicator of the state's inelasticity and the likelihood that even in a bad national environment for Democrats, it will remain highly competitive.

The Bottom Line

With Democrats in power in Washington and an unpopular Biden, historical trends suggest the Republican Party should have a pretty good election cycle, especially in states such as Georgia that have strong Republican DNA.

As Senate races become more nationalized, and voting patterns more polarized, it is fair to ask how much candidate quality — to the extent such a thing can be measured — matters to the result of an election. Warnock is a strong candidate for Democrats, with a compelling background, massive war chest, and the ability to claim credit for the infrastructure funding that is headed Georgia's way. And unlike an incumbent who has to reintroduce himself after six years away, he's still fresh in voters' minds.

Walker, by contrast, has vulnerabilities that likely would have sunk most other candidates — Parnell in Pennsylvania was accused of far less and already dropped out — and was unsuccessfully dissuaded from running by Senate Republicans worried about his ability to win the seat.

If Biden's support continues to depreciate and the national environment does not improve, Democrats may be hard-pressed to pick up seats such as Wisconsin and Pennsylvania, and will be at serious risk of losing their own seats in New Hampshire, Arizona, or Nevada. That makes it all the more important that the party holds Georgia if it hopes to maintain its narrowest of Senate majorities.

IE

Statewide Election Results in Georgia

