

## Georgia Becomes Blue for Biden. But Why?

Georgia flipped blue for Biden after 28 years of voting red. How did this happen? And what lessons should we carry into Georgia's upcoming runoff elections in early January?

One of the major reasons behind Georgia's flip in the 2020 presidential elections was the dissolution of the discriminatory Exact Match policy in 2019. Under this policy, if a voter's information did not 100% match the databases, they would be purged from the voting roll. This policy was used to allegedly combat voter fraud. This mechanism tended to target people with ethnic names which are usually more complicated and more difficult to spell.

The argument of voter fraud has been used to justify the suppression of votes from communities of color, culminating in Georgia's controversial 2018 midterm governor election results in which Stacey Abrams lost the gubernatorial race to her Republican rival. The now-dissolved Exact Match policy tipped the scales against her by strategically suppressing the votes of the predominantly Democratic black community.

In the 2018 midterm election, this law classified 53,000 Georgians as "pending applicants", among which nearly [70% were black](#). Pending applicants were required to provide further proof of identity within a given time frame or else their registration would be rejected.

Not only were black people more likely to be flagged as "pending", but these complications also deterred them to a greater extent, and hence this resulted in less political representation for black Georgians. Their pending status and the subsequent actions that one needs to take to resolve this status are especially problematic for those caught in the intersection of blackness and low-income.

On average, black families have net worths that are [ten times](#) lower than white households. Under such circumstances, black people are likely to work multiple jobs and do not

have the time to address voter identification issues. For many, taking time off work is the difference between putting food on the table and going hungry.

While poll taxes have been ruled unconstitutional under the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment, Stacey Abrams argues that the quantifiable economic opportunity cost that these workers face is essentially the modern form of a “poll tax”: [“Georgia has a disproportionately high number of paycheck-to-paycheck workers...African Americans are more likely to face long lines \[to vote\], sometimes up to four hours. That is half a day’s pay.”](#)

The time it takes for one to vote becomes increasingly problematic given that in 2018, [“ten counties with large black populations in Georgia closed polling spots.”](#) Black people needed to travel farther and take even more time off work to cast their ballot. Thus, voter suppression is acutely targeted towards members of the black community and the lower socio-economic class.

The Exact Match policy was passed without federal oversight. The reason that Georgia - and other states - is able to implement such policies is based on the 2013 Supreme Court decision that struck down the section 5 preclearance of the Voting Rights Act. This preclearance originally restricted states with a history of racist legislation from making laws that target people of color. For example, the Exact Match policy was initially blocked by the Voting Rights Act when it was introduced in 2008. It was revived in 2013 but was struck down again in 2019.

Looking forward, there needs to be a re-establishment of federal oversight to ensure that voter suppression is prevented in the first place. In order to offset the economic opportunity cost for low-income, predominantly black Georgians to ensure they are able to travel to the polling stations and cast their votes, Georgia also needs to provide paid time off for them to do so.

But what does this mean for Georgia’s upcoming runoff elections? Although it does not seem to have the weight of a presidential election, votes in the runoff will be more important

than ever. If Democrats win both senate seats, they would achieve a majority in the Senate, enough to pass policy changes to address discriminatory voting practices.

While the dissolution of the Exact Match is a good first step, there are still many barriers that low income, black Georgians face when it comes to political representation. Stacey Abrams took the flawed voting system into her own hands and founded Fair Fight and Fair Count, which registered over [800,000 voters](#) in Georgia, shifting the red state into blue territory. Her activist work is an example of what can be done with a broken system, but she shouldn't have to be the only one trying to fix it.