



Jon Ossoff, left, and Raphael Warnock wave to the crowd during a campaign rally in Augusta, Ga., Monday, Jan. 4, 2021. Democrats Ossoff and Warnock are challenging incumbent Republican Senators David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler in a runoff election on Jan. 5. (Michael Holahan/The Augusta Chronicle via AP)

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Democrats won both Georgia Senate seats — and with them, the U.S. Senate majority — as final votes were counted Wednesday, serving President Donald Trump a stunning defeat in his last days in office while dramatically improving the fate of President-elect Joe Biden’s progressive agenda.

Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock, Democratic challengers who represented the diversity of their party’s evolving coalition, defeated Republicans David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler two months after Biden became the first Democratic presidential candidate to carry the state since 1992.

Warnock, who served as pastor for the same Atlanta church where civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. preached, becomes the first African American from Georgia elected to the Senate. And Ossoff becomes the state’s first Jewish senator and, at 33 years old, the Senate’s youngest member.

Their success is a symbol of a striking shift in Georgia’s politics as the swelling number of diverse, college-educated voters flex their power in the heart of the Deep South.

This week’s elections mark the formal finale to the turbulent 2020 election season. The unusually high stakes transformed Georgia, once a solidly Republican state, into one of the nation’s premier battlegrounds for the final days of Trump’s presidency — and likely beyond.

In an emotional address early Wednesday, Warnock vowed to work for all Georgians whether they voted for him or not, citing his personal experience with the American dream. His mother, he said, used to pick “somebody else’s cotton” as a teenager.

“The other day, because this is America, the 82-year-old hands that used to pick somebody else’s cotton picked her youngest son to be a United States senator,” he said. “Tonight, we proved with hope, hard work and the people by our side, anything is possible.”

In an interview with ABC’s “Good Morning America,” he described his win as a “reversal of the old Southern strategy that sought to divide people,” Warnock told ABC’s “Good Morning America.”

Loeffler remains a Georgia senator until the results of Tuesday's election are finalized, returned to Washington on Wednesday morning to join a small group of senators planning to challenge Congress’ vote to certify Biden’s victory.

Georgia’s other runoff election pitted Perdue, a 71-year-old former business executive who held his Senate seat until his term expired on Sunday, against Ossoff, a former congressional aide and journalist.

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“This campaign has been about health and jobs and justice for the people of this state — for all the people of this state,” Ossoff said in a speech broadcast on social media Wednesday morning. “Whether you were for me, or against me, I’ll be for you in the U.S. Senate. I will serve all the people of the state.”

Trump’s false claims of voter fraud cast a dark shadow over the runoff elections, which were held only because no candidate hit the 50% threshold in the general election. He attacked the state’s election chief on the eve of the election and raised the prospect that some votes might not be counted even as votes were being cast Tuesday afternoon.

Republican state officials on the ground reported no significant problems.

Both contests tested whether the political coalition that fueled Biden’s November victory was an anti-Trump anomaly or part of a new electoral landscape. To win in Tuesday’s elections — and in the future — Democrats needed strong African American support.

Drawing on his popularity with Black voters, among other groups, Biden won Georgia's 16 electoral votes by about 12,000 votes out of 5 million cast in November.

Trump's claims about voter fraud in the 2020 election, while meritless, resonated with Republican voters in Georgia. About 7 in 10 agreed with his false assertion that Biden was not the legitimately elected president, according to AP VoteCast, a survey of more than 3,600 voters in the runoff elections.

Election officials across the country, including the Republican governors in Arizona and Georgia, as well as Trump's former attorney general, William Barr, have confirmed that there was no widespread fraud in the November election. Nearly all the legal challenges from Trump and his allies have been dismissed by judges, including two tossed by the Supreme Court, where three Trump-nominated justices preside.

Publicly and privately, some Republicans acknowledged that Trump's monthslong push to undermine the integrity of the nation's electoral system may have contributed to the GOP's losses in Georgia.

"It turns out that telling the voters that the election was rigged is not a great way to turn out your voters," said Utah Sen. Mitt Romney, a Republican and a frequent Trump critic.

Even with Trump's claims, voters in both parties were drawn to the polls because of the high stakes. AP VoteCast found that 6 in 10 Georgia voters say Senate party control was the most important factor in their vote.

Turnout exceeded both sides' expectations.

Even before Tuesday, Georgia had shattered its turnout record for a runoff with more than 3 million votes by mail or during in-person advance voting in December. Including Tuesday's vote, more people ultimately cast ballots in the runoffs than voted in Georgia's 2016 presidential election.

Many in Georgia's large African American community were ecstatic when they awoke to news of Harnock's win on Wednesday.

Tracey Bailey, a 58-year-old assistant community manager at an apartment complex in downtown Atlanta, said she jumped for joy.

“It’s going to be great for Georgia, and it’s going to be great for our Black community as a whole,” she said. “I think he’s going to be a fair guy for the people, and that’s for all people.”