

Democrats claim victory in Georgia Senate races

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In a blow to President Donald Trump and the Republican Party, Democratic challengers in two pivotal Senate runoff races in Georgia, Reverend Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff, defeated Republican incumbents Kelly Loeffler and David Perdue. The result, if it survives various challenges, would leave the US Senate divided between 50 Republicans and 50 Democrats, with the vice president holding the tiebreaking vote.

After the inauguration of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris on January 20—assuming that occurs as scheduled—the Democrats would take the majority in the Senate and Democrat Chuck Schumer would replace Republican Mitch McConnell as majority leader. With Biden, Schumer and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, the Democrats would be in control of the White House and both houses of Congress for the first time since 2010.

As he did in the November election, Trump has claimed that the Georgia vote was “rigged” and that Warnock and Ossoff’s vote totals were artificially inflated by late night “vote dumps.” Neither Loeffler nor Perdue have conceded their races, with multiple recounts, court challenges and lawsuits possible in the coming days as the final votes are tallied.

Due to the out-of-control spread of the coronavirus, over 3 million voters decided to vote by mail or cast early votes, rather than attend crowded polling places on January 5. Unlike the general election November 3, however, state election officials were prepared to begin counting the early votes as soon as the polls opened Tuesday morning, and most vote counting was completed by early Wednesday morning.

In response to Trump’s ongoing claims of election fraud, Gabriel Sterling, a top Republican Georgia election official and frequent target of Trump’s attacks,

said on Wednesday that there wasn’t any “evidence of any irregularities. The biggest thing we’ve seen is from the president’s fertile mind of finding fraud where none exists.”

The runoff races are the most expensive Senate races in US history. Together, the four candidates and their political allies have spent more than \$830 million on the two races, more than double the \$343.1 million that was spent on the entire 2000 presidential election between George W. Bush and Al Gore. In part due to a surge in internet contributions, Ossoff and Warnock actually raised more money than Loeffler, the wife of the CEO of the New York Stock Exchange, and Perdue, former CEO of Dollar General.

The runoff elections were held under Georgia laws requiring a candidate to win 50 percent of the vote in the general election. Perdue narrowly missed that mark, leading Ossoff by 49.7 percent to 48 percent, while Warnock and Loeffler advanced to the runoff after a fractured contest with 20 candidates on the ballot, in which Warnock led with 32.9 percent.

The runoff was dominated by Trump’s continued attempts to subvert the results of the national vote, including in Georgia, where Biden captured the state’s 16 electoral votes by a margin of 11,779 votes. Only three days before the runoff vote, Trump conducted an hour-long telephone call with Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger in which he demanded that state officials “find” the votes necessary to overturn Biden’s victory.

Perdue and Loeffler campaigned as full-throated advocates of Trump and his bogus claims of a stolen election. While the two Democrats campaigned with Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris, they followed Biden’s direction and sought to downplay the danger of dictatorship and spread complacency about

Trump's threats to democracy.

Over the weekend, Trump held a rally with the Republican candidates in Dalton, a large town in the northwest Georgia congressional district where Marjorie Taylor Greene, an open supporter of the fascist QAnon tendency, was the victorious Republican candidate in November. The location was chosen both to show Trump's support for the fascists and to counter reports of flagging turnout in the early voting in heavily Republican areas.

About 1 a.m. Wednesday, the major television networks and the Associated Press called the special Senate race in favor of Warnock over Loeffler, as his lead swelled to more than 50,000 votes. The networks called the Ossoff victory over Perdue, which came by a smaller margin, about 20,000 votes, late Wednesday afternoon.

Over 4.5 million turned out to vote in the two run-off elections, more than 90 percent of the 4.9 million who voted in the Georgia November presidential election. There was a significant increase in the proportion of black and working class voters in the electorate, compared to November 3.

Warnock was the senior pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, the former pulpit of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He will be the first African-American senator from Georgia in its history. Ossoff, at the age of 33, will be the youngest senator elected from any state since 1973, and the first Jewish senator from Georgia.

Despite the inevitable media celebrations of this "victory" for diversity, the Democrats are trusted servants of corporate America and the capitalist state. Warnock's clerical position is one of the prime perquisites of the black political establishment in Atlanta, which has been tightly integrated into the US political elite, and he was selected for the nomination by party leaders. Ossoff is a graduate of the Georgetown School of Foreign Service, a former aide to Representative Hank Johnson, and became a documentary producer specializing in Africa and the Middle East.

The two Republican senators ran virulent red-baiting campaigns, claiming that the election of the two Democrats would turn America into a socialist country. Both laced their campaign advertisements with racist and anti-Semitic tropes, including ads that darkened Warnock's skin to emphasize his race, and elongated

Ossoff's nose, a typical anti-Semitic slur.

The two Democrats highlighted the rampant corruption of the two Republican incumbents, including claims of insider trading. Both Perdue and Loeffler were investigated by the Senate Ethics Committee for dumping soon-to-be worthless stock after they received classified intelligence briefings last winter about the danger of the coronavirus.

Loeffler tried to portray Warnock as "anti-Israel," condemning sermons given by Warnock in which he made mild criticisms of Israel for shooting and killing unarmed Palestinian protesters during a 2018 sermon. Warnock responded by swinging to the right, supporting increased military aid to Israel and declaring his opposition to the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement.



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