VOTE-365

# MIDTERM MOTIVATIONS

## GEORGIA VOTERS +
## THE 2022 MIDTERM ELECTION

FAIR COUNT

# CONTENTS

# INTRODUCTION

Though the 2022 midterm election was often inescapable in the news and media, voter turnout decreased in 42 states compared to the 2018 midterms, and nationwide turnout fell below 47%.[1] In the South, every state but Arkansas had lower participation. Furthermore, Black vote share decreased in every Southern state compared to 2018, as well as in comparison to the presidential election of 2020.[1] Hispanic vote share similarly decreased or remained the same across the region.

Throughout rural Georgia, Fair Count's organizers have seen first-hand the widening gap in turnout among Black, Latine, and Native voters, and it pushed us to dig deeper and understand the motivations behind the voting history, so that we can better engage these communities in civic life.

Fair Count dedicated its organizing efforts in 2023 to find out why turnout decreased by going straight to the source—talking to voters and non-voters across Georgia's 149 counties outside of the Atlanta Metropolitan Area. Strengthened by our mission and commitment to year-round organizing, we recruited participants from across the state to complete a "midterm motivation survey" to help us understand why some registered Black, Latine, and Native voters chose not to cast a ballot in the 2022 Midterm Election.

---

1    TargetSmart. National 2022 Early & Absentee Vote Report. targetearly.targetsmart.com/g2022

2    New Era Colorado. "The Youth Agenda: Young Coloradans' Hopes, Dreams, and Vision for the Future " 2021. (https://neweracolorad1.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/WRITTEN-REPORT-The-Youth-Agenda-Young-Coloradans-Hopes-Dreams-and-Vision-for-the-Future.pdf).

# 1. WHO WE TALKED TO

In Georgia, Fair Count's universe is the 1,222,078 Black, Latine, and Native registered voters in the 149 counties outside the Atlanta metro, and for this report, Fair Count specifically focused on the decreased turnout among these voters. We designed a mixed qualitative and quantitative survey to answer our research question: What factors led to the decreased vote share of rural Black, Latine, and Native communities in the 2022 midterm election? From April 20 to September 28, 2023, we collected responses via phone (cold outreach), in person at community events, as well as online. In collaboration with an ethnographer at the Union of Concerned Scientists, we also adapted the survey into a moderator guide for focus groups and one-on-one conversations with people who did not vote in 2022. (See Appendix 1A and 1B for the survey and focus group questions.)

## RECRUITMENT DETAILS:

1. Cold calls. Organizers dialed through a list of registered voters of color in Fair Count's Georgia universe.[3] To ensure we were connecting with folks of varying levels of civic engagement, the list excluded anyone who had given Fair Count a commitment to vote (CTV) in the past. In total, organizers made calls to 12,410 contacts.

2. 1:1 outreach. Organizers used their 1:1 meetings with existing contacts to conduct the survey. The primary target of this outreach were respondents who had given Fair Count a CTV for the 2022 midterm and/ or runoff. In total, 86 surveys came from 1:1s.

---
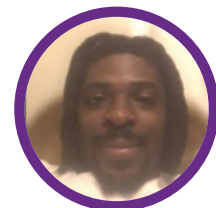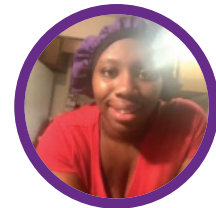
3    We conducted several balance checks on our call list, to ensure we were calling equally-sized groups of voters and non-voters with similar vote propensities across all relevant counties.

3. Tabling at community events. Organizers set up tables at community cookouts, neighborhood Juneteenth programs, and church gatherings, and engaged those who stopped at the table to fill out the survey. 106 people participated in the survey at events.

4. Promotion on social media. Calls to participate in the digital survey were made on Fair Count's Twitter account and Facebook page to a total audience of around 25,000 followers and in the email newsletter, which is sent to nearly 16,000 subscribers.

5. Focus groups. The organizing team recruited contacts from their networks to participate in small group conversations in 7 communities across the state: Americus (Sumter County), Shellman (Randolph County), Dawson (Terrell County), Macon (Bibb County), Cordele (Crisp County), Garden City (Chatham County) and Milledgeville (Baldwin County). Where needed, organizers also texted lists pulled from the national voter file of nearby residents who had not voted in the 2022 midterm to recruit additional focus group participants. Additionally, Fair Count hosted one virtual focus group, for which participants were recruited via texts to registered voters. Thirty-three people participated across the 8 focus groups, with an average size of 4 participants per conversation. Focus group participants were offered nominal gift cards to compensate them for their extended time commitment.

**HEADSHOTS ARE OF SELECT FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS FROM ACROSS THE STATE.**

In total, we collected 359 survey responses: 160 from cold outreach, 106 from events, 86 from existing contacts, and 7 digital surveys submitted online (see Figure 1). We then matched survey respondents to the voter file to compile demographic and geographic information. Overall, we successfully matched 91% of all responses. The cold phone outreach, especially, was key to this success, since our call list was created from the voter file. Other recruitment methods (canvassing at events, focus groups, digital promotion) were less effective in collecting enough information to match respondents to the voter file. Of surveys generated from events, for example, only 86% were matchable to the voter file.[4]

### FIGURE 1. SURVEYS BY RECRUITMENT METHOD

|  | Surveys Collected | Matched to Voter File | % Matched to Voter File | Vote History Matched | % of total Surveys Collected |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cold Calls | 160 | 157 | 98% | 124 | 78% |
| Events | 106 | 91 | 86% | 80 | 75% |
| Existing Contacts | 86 | 80 | 93% | 68 | 79% |
| Online | 7 | 0 | 0% | - | 0% |
| All | 359 | 328 | 91% | 272 | 76% |

4    In addition to missing data, human error may have prevented a successful match at several points in the data collection process. Organizers were trained to confirm that the person who answered the phone was the person whose name was on our call list, for example, but this was not always possible. When searching the respondent's name in the voter file, there were also instances where our search returned 3 or more possible matches. For these reasons, the majority of our analysis is limited to the individuals we feel confident were successfully matched.

**"Do you mind sharing if you voted in the November election?"**

As part of an introductory section to the survey script, asked: "Do you mind sharing if you voted in the November election?" We found that this self-reported vote history was at times at odds with what the voter file listed for a person. We believe the two main reasons for this occurrence were: 1) people feeling a sense of embarrassment around not having voted,[5] and 2) people legitimately not distinguishing the November 2022 midterm election from other elections. People would sometimes talk about having voted, but then refer to candidates and issues from the 2020 and 2021 elections in Georgia. When asked about voting, some people were referring back to the last election that they remember having voted in, rather than reflecting back to November 2022 specifically. We also talked to some people who voted in the runoff election in December 2022, but not in the midterm general election in November.[6] For our analysis we considered anyone who voted in November or December 2022 as "having voted".[7] Our analysis thus includes 272 (76% of initially collected) survey responses. Our findings also include themes and quotes from the 8 focus groups and 2 one-on-one conversations that followed the focus groups.

---

5    Understandably, some people aren't comfortable talking to a stranger about why they didn't vote. People also understood that we were calling from a civic engagement nonprofit and we think in some cases people were telling us what they perceived to be "socially acceptable" answers rather than what they actually thought. Once we realized the extent to which this was happening, we adjusted the phone recruitment list to only include non-voters from November and adjusted the script to specify that "we want to talk to people about why they didn't vote", instead of giving respondents the option to self report.

6    We would have been better served to ask some of these questions more immediately after the November 2022 election when recall may have been better. We also received advice from our UCS qualitative researcher that people find it easier to answer questions about their future motivations than their past. We'd likely include more future-looking questions in subsequent iterations of this project.

7    Surveys where self-reported vote history didn't match the voter file (i.e. someone told us they voted, but the voter file did not reflect the same vote history vote) were excluded from our analysis, due to lack of confidence in their identity or voting motivations. 56 surveys (16% of all surveys) were excluded due to vote history inconsistencies.

## AMONG SURVEY RESPONDENTS, WE REACHED:

- Three voters for every non-voter (200 to 72, or 74% to 26%)

As discussed above, we were able to connect with the most respondents over the phone – this was also the most successful way of reaching non-voters, with 72% (52) of non-voting respondents coming from cold outreach. Some non-voters (9) were also willing to fill out the survey at events. Meanwhile, the majority of organizers' existing contacts had voted in the 2022 midterm.

- 69 counties across Georgia, more than half of which are rural

We were fortunate to have various programmatic teams at Fair Count contribute to the collection of surveys. In some cases, specific individuals were so successful in working survey collection into their local outreach strategy (at local events, during phone banking, and at scheduled 1:1 meetings) that the geographic spread of responses became skewed. For example, 25% of all surveys came from Screven County where one organizer was based (see Figure 2). Given that this data set is not intended to be representative of the entire state, we still feel confident in including all of these responses. To validate some findings, we narrowed the responses to those that were collected during phone banking where the geographic spread of those who answered the phone was more random.

### FIGURE 2. SURVEYS COLLECTED BY COUNTY



8
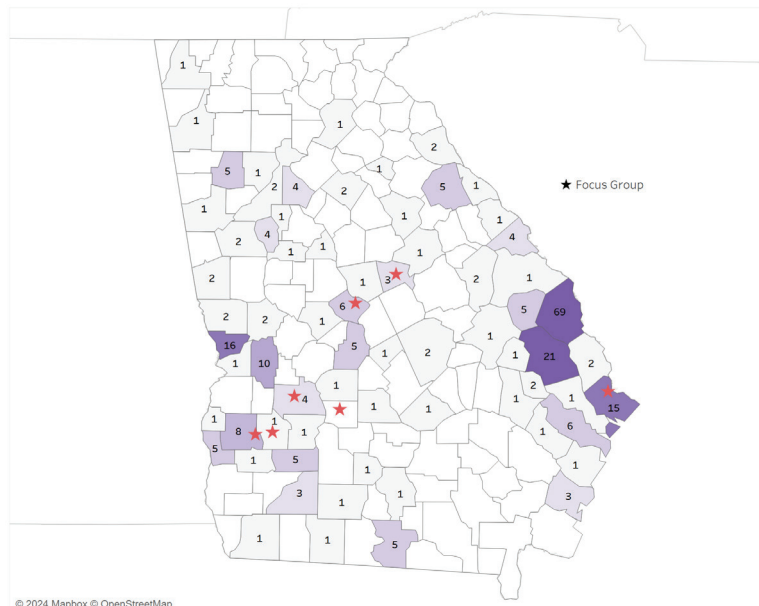
- A mix of new and established contacts

We set an initial goal of reaching 100 respondents who had committed to vote with Fair Count and at least 100 respondents who hadn't. We nearly reached this goal: 30% of our respondents (78) having completed a commitment to vote (CTV) card in the 2022 general or runoff, and 70% (183) having not engaged with Fair Count around the election. We had hoped to reach a comparable set of voters and non-voters in each group; however, it was easier to engage voters across both CTV and non-CTV categories.

- Voters and non-voters across a range of ages

On average, the voters we spoke with were 12 years older than the non-voters (with average age of 58 vs. 46). This skew in age comes primarily from our established connections with older voters. Through other outreach methods, we were unable to contact non-voters of the same age. Figure 3 shows distribution of responses by age category.

## FIGURE 3. RESPONDENTS BY AGE
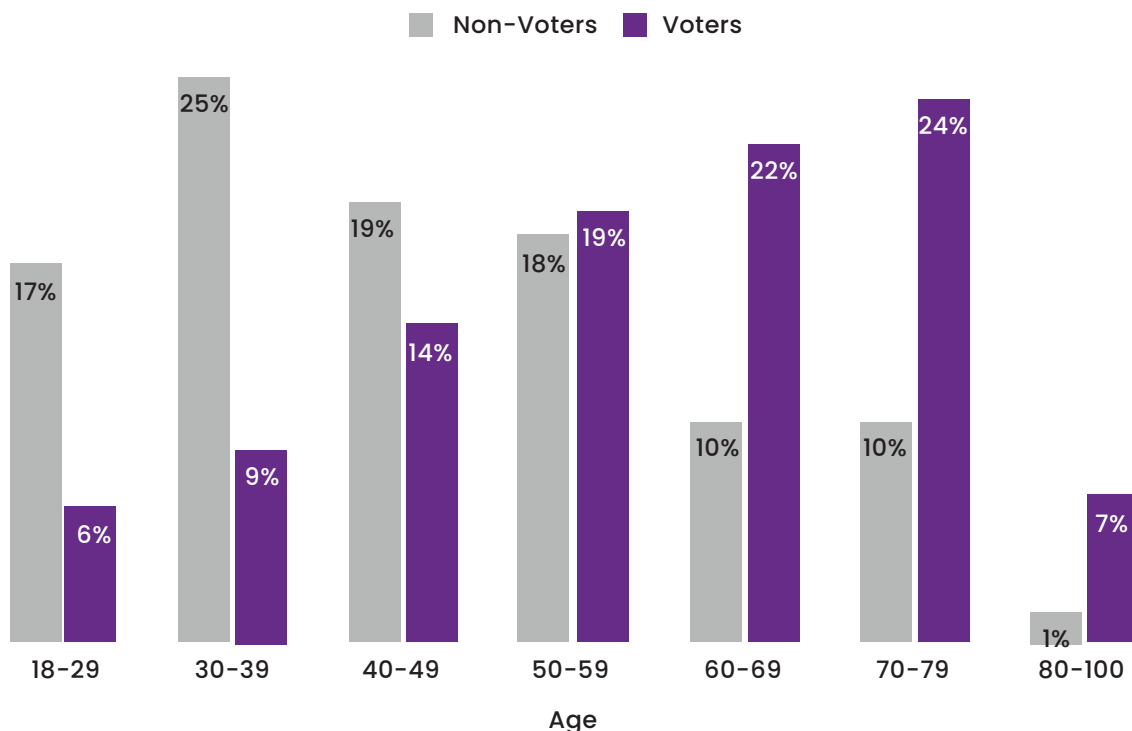
● Mostly voters of color

In line with Fair Count's mission and strategy, our phone outreach universe was specifically narrowed to Black, Latine and Native voters. In other modes of outreach, like event canvassing, who we talked to was more organic and determined by who was present. Figure 4 shows the percentage breakdown by race for people that were interviewed. This closely aligns with the community that Fair Count usually engages in its work, which is made up of about 85% Black voters.

**FIGURE 4. RESPONDENTS BY RACE AND VOTE HISTORY**

|  | Non-Voters | Voters |
|---|---|---|
| **Black** | 83% | 90% |
| **Hispanic** | 7% | 2% |
| **Native American** | 3% | 0% |
| **Other** | 7% | 7% |
| **White** | 0% | 2% |

# 2. 2022 MIDTERM DEBRIEF

Experiences of the 2022 general and runoff elections differed between voters and non-voters, but several important themes emerged across all respondents.

## "HARD TO IGNORE": HOW PARTICIPANTS FOLLOWED THE ELECTION

Voters we talked to followed the election much more closely than non-voters (see Figure 5). 95% of voters and 56% of non-voters said they were "somewhat closely" paying attention to the election. Many respondents expressed the pervasive presence the election had in their lives: *"I watched and followed the November election whenever I could. There was so much positive and negative information that it was very difficult not to pay attention to it."* One participant said, *"Could not ignore it — I received mail every single day! I kept up with the news also."* Another noted, *"At times there was no other choice because it was everywhere you turned."*

**FIGURE 5.**
**HOW CLOSELY WERE YOU FOLLOWING THE 2022 MIDTERM ELECTION?**



Non-Voters: Not at all 44%, Somewhat Closely 35%, Closely 15%, Very Closely 6%

Voters: Not at all (unlabeled), Somewhat Closely 19%, Closely 36%, Very Closely 40%

Legend: Not at all, Somewhat Closely, Closely, Very Closely
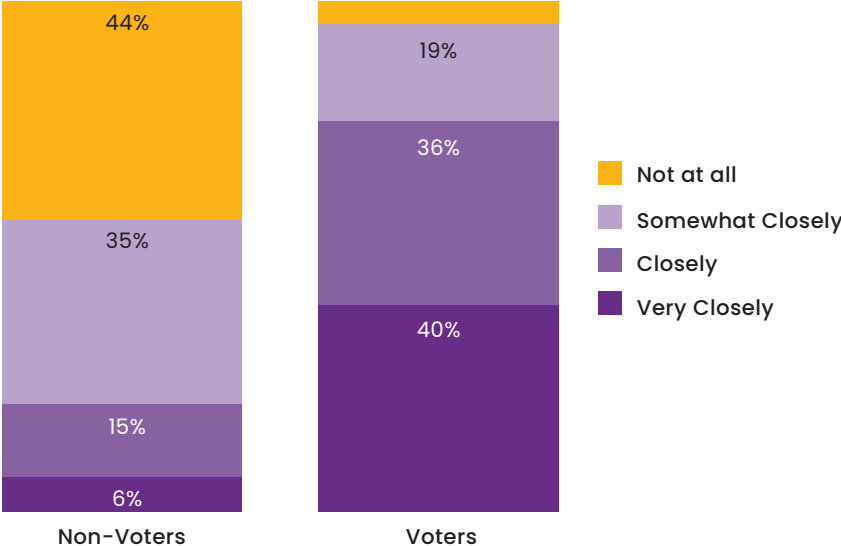
The largest share of non-voters (44%) did not follow the election at all. This "not at all" category comprised more young people than the other non-voter categories. It also included respondents who had previously voted. That said, with more than half of non-voters at least "somewhat closely" following the election, including 21% who were "closely or very closely" following, there may be opportunities to engage many non-voters in deeper conversations.

## OVERWHELMED WITH OUTREACH: HOW PARTICIPANTS WERE CONTACTED AND WHAT INFORMATION THEY RECEIVED

97% of voters and 83% of non-voters recalled being contacted about voting in the weeks leading up to the midterm.[8] Mail and phone were the most common outreach methods recalled by all respondents, with 76% of voters and 43% of non-voters having received phone calls and 75% of voters and 47% of non-voters recalling mailers (see Figure 6 for more contact methods).

**FIGURE 6. HOW WERE YOU CONTACTED?**

|  | Non-Voters | Voters |
|---|---|---|
| **Mail** | 47% | 76% |
| **Phone Call** | 43% | 76% |
| **TV Ads** | 38% | 67% |
| **Text Message** | 36% | 71% |
| **Online Ads** | 24% | 37% |
| **Door Conversation** | 17% | 33% |
| **Radio** | 13% | 30% |
| **Event Invitation** | 8% | 41% |

While many were contacted, one voter pointed out that information came too late: *"Initially, there wasn't enough information about the election, and that left people wondering about what was going on. However, as the election date got closer, there was an overload of commercial mailings and other candidate information with a lot of it arriving after many people had early voted."*

---

8    While these numbers are incredibly high, we expect this is likely an overestimate of the general population due to participation bias of those willing to respond to the survey.

Most respondents echoed the sentiment that the volume of contact was overwhelming. From a voter: *"At one point, it became overwhelming with the amount of information that the media was showing."* The volume of contact did not always encourage engagement, as one non-voter shared, "*I really didn't pay close attention, but I got A LOT of messages about it."* One voter commented that the ads interrupted her work: *"Ads were overwhelming. I'm an educator teaching online and very often had to stop what I was doing because ads were so disruptive."*
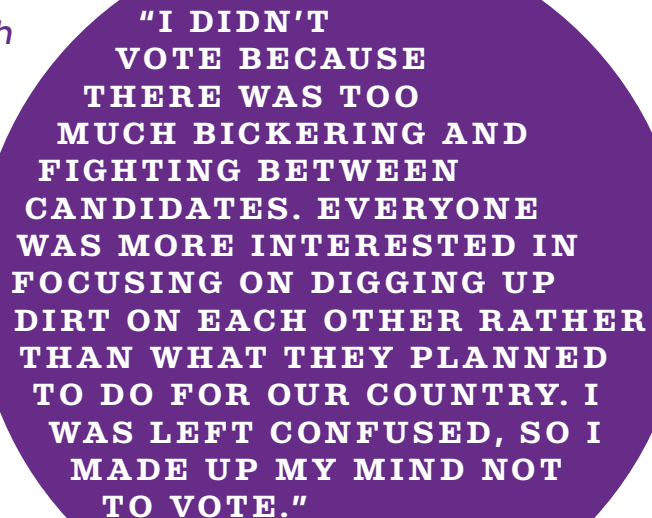
The negative tone and content of campaign ads, debates, and outreach were dissuading factors for some to follow the election, or even vote.

*"I didn't follow the election too closely. There was so much negative news that I just didn't devote too much time to it."*

*"Here goes the mud-slinging. I don't know who's right or wrong, it's kind of confusing."*

*"The debate was a big kindergarten for babies."*

*"When I was little, they weren't dishing out personal business . . . So when they were doing that I was like 'older folks throwing low blows, they don't care. 'Them folks don't care.'"*

**"I DIDN'T VOTE BECAUSE THERE WAS TOO MUCH BICKERING AND FIGHTING BETWEEN CANDIDATES. EVERYONE WAS MORE INTERESTED IN FOCUSING ON DIGGING UP DIRT ON EACH OTHER RATHER THAN WHAT THEY PLANNED TO DO FOR OUR COUNTRY. I WAS LEFT CONFUSED, SO I MADE UP MY MIND NOT TO VOTE."**

Overall, voters reported higher rates of contact across the various methods than non-voters, likely reflecting the common campaign strategy of prioritizing outreach to higher propensity voters. We further compiled contact rate data by age in Figure 7, which revealed several interesting differences in how generations are reached. Phone calls were tremendously common among those who voted, particularly for those over 50 (82% of whom remembered receiving a phone call). In stark contrast, only 34% of younger non-voters indicated they had received a call. Door conversations were also less often reported by non-voters under 50, however we repeatedly heard a preference for in-person communication by younger focus group participants.

**FIGURE 7.**
**CONTACT METHOD BY AGE**

|  | Non-Voters | | Voters | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Under 50 | Over 50 | Under 50 | Over 50 |
| **Mail** | 50% | 43% | 66% | 79% |
| **Phone call** | 34% | 57% | 60% | 82% |
| **TV ads** | 36% | 39% | 48% | 75% |
| **Text message** | 39% | 32% | 74% | 70% |
| **Online ads** | 30% | 14% | 29% | 40% |
| **Door conversation** | 11% | 25% | 31% | 34% |
| **Radio** | 16% | 7% | 29% | 30% |
| **Event invitation** | 9% | 7% | 26% | 48% |

Some voting information was well distributed, such as general reminders to vote (see Figure 8). Among those who were contacted, a large majority of voters (80%) and nearly half of non-voters (46%) received voting reminders. Messaging about the importance of voting was the second most common type of communication to non-voters (32%). Meanwhile, voters received instructions on voting early and absentee slightly more often than messages on why voting matters (58% to 57%). Only 21% of non-voters we talked to recalled receiving early and absentee voting information, yet they may have benefitted from this information as several admitted to running out of time to vote.

**FIGURE 8.**
**WHAT TYPE OF INFORMATION DID YOU RECEIVE?**

|  | Non-Voters | Voters |
|---|---|---|
| Voting Reminders | 46% | 80% |
| Info on why voting matters | 32% | 57% |
| How to register to vote | 29% | 55% |
| How to vote early/absentee | 21% | 58% |
| Where candidates stand on issues | 17% | 38% |
| Info on what different elected officials do | 7% | 35% |
| Info on voting for the formerly incarcerated | 4% | 18% |

Respondents repeatedly mentioned the difficulty keeping up with information and conducting the independent research needed to make informed decisions when casting their ballots. This type of civic education was some of the least well distributed information during the election, according to respondents. As one voter told us: *"I am most motivated by local [elections,] but least educated about local [elections]. [I] need to research more."*

## STRAIGHTFORWARD BUT NOT ALWAYS ACCESSIBLE: PARTICIPANTS VOTING EXPERIENCES

We asked survey respondents how challenging it was or would have been to vote, ranking from a scale of 1 (easy) to 5 (hard). Overall, respondents gave an average score of 1.3, though a few mentioned difficulty voting.

However, both voters and non-voters with low difficulty scores identified changes needed to make voting more accessible. Among those who answered the question, more than half of voters (54%) and non-voters (56%) want more weekend voting (see Figure 9). Others also advocated for later polling hours to accommodate those who work early shifts and cannot take time off of work:

### FIGURE 9. WHAT WOULD HAVE MADE VOTING EASIER?

|  | Non-Voters | Voters |
|---|---|---|
| Expanded weekend voting | 54% | 56% |
| More info on candidates' stance | 40% | 41% |
| Additional outreach from campaigns | 37% | 34% |
| Making absentee voting easier | 29% | 35% |
| Additional dropboxes | 17% | 29% |

In general, we heard various statements from voters who would benefit from expanded voting access or added flexibility around absentee requirements:

*"People who travel for work or people who are out of state for school… having a better option, because it's very difficult to get an absentee ballot and make it to the postal office at times; they close early. I'm just speaking from personal experience. If I work from 7 to 7, there's no way for me to get my absentee ballot even in the mail."*

## PARTICIPANTS' VOTING HISTORY

The 2022 midterm voters who we talked to were primarily super voters (61%) or frequent voters (28%), rarely missing a previous election (see figure 10).[9] We did talk to several infrequent voters and also reached two folks (1%) who had never voted before, did not vote in the 2022 general, but decided to vote in the 2022 general runoff. When asked why they voted, one participant expressed that *"the young generation are counted out"* when it comes to the elections, and she *"wanted to be counted. Voting has consequences and it starts at the local level."*

### FIGURE 10. PARTICIPANTS' VOTING HISTORY

|  | Non-Voter | Voters |
|---|---|---|
| **Super Voter** | – | 61% |
| **Frequent Voter** | 14% | 28% |
| **Infrequent Voter** | 38% | 11% |
| **Never Voted** | 46% | 1% |
| **Unregistered** | 3% | – |

In contrast, almost half (46%) of the 2022 midterm non-voters had never voted before, and 38% were infrequent voters. We connected with a few people who are unregistered, as well as some frequent voters who did not turn out for the general or runoff in 2022. One frequent voter commented that she only votes in presidential elections, while others faced competing demands for their time.

---

9    As categorized by TargetSmart's "voter status" variable, which is based on previous vote history.

## WHAT DIDN'T ARISE: SPECIFIC ISSUES

Initiating these conversations, we expected to hear respondents mention policy positions on health care, immigration, and the economy as primary motivations for their decision to vote. At the very least, we thought debate topics or themes from the frequently mentioned ads on TV would be mentioned. However, across all groups, specific issues were largely absent from our conversations with voters (179 out of 200) and non-voters (65 out of 72). **When asked what would most motivate them to vote in the future, only 15% of voters and 28% of non-voters said a promise to take action on an issue, which was a far second to the top answer — seeing my vote make a difference in the community.**

While we could have a more issue-focused conversation if we had directly asked participants about the importance of issues in their decision to vote, it's nonetheless interesting that most people didn't bring up the candidate platforms on their own. Instead, participants generally discussed values, identity, local concerns, and whether or not voting "works." One voter invoked history, Black identity, and trust in the process of voting when he reflected on why he participated in 2022:

"*My reason for voting is that we've been singing "We Shall Overcome" for a mighty long time. I'm just saying that it's about time for us to sing a new song of "We Have Overcome." It's time and the only way we can make that happen is to vote. Voting gets us there.*"

Many of our focus group conversations led to discussions of problems like local roads in disrepair rather than the statewide policy positions of candidates. Here's one example from our Sumter County focus group:

"*And as far as transportation, like the roads and things, it be especially bad on our sides of town, you know what I'm saying? And a lot of people don't even know that [it takes] a toll, you know. That's extra money, just little things, you know, mess up the front-end alignment, mess up the axles and tires.*"

Generally, survey respondents focused more on local and non-traditional campaign concerns as opposed to partisanship or political parties, despite discussing a midterm election that was quite politically charged. We identified only 8 of 272 interviewees as being specifically partisan in their responses.

## WHAT DID ARISE: YEAR-ROUND ORGANIZING

*"There are not enough African Americans in my communities that are organizing,"* said one survey respondent. While several established community partners emerged from our conversations (with voters in particular) as leading civic engagement organizations, including the NAACP, Black Voters Matter, Masons and Eastern Stars — voters and non-voters alike, across the state indicated a lack of organizing in their communities.

### WE THEN POSED THE QUESTION TO FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS:

## What's the best way to engage people in civic life?

In Americus, the answer was, *"the answer was, "what we're doing now… [sitting] around a table like this where we gotta be vocal."* In Dawson, a participant explained that Fair Count is filling a gap that community organizations, candidates, and elected officials are not addressing: *"People, like you guys come in and try to, you know, make things better. But the people [that are here, that are] supposed to, that we're electing — they're not, they're not even worried and not even caring about it."*

When asked what they look for to demonstrate care, the participant highlighted a local candidate's year-round presence in the community: *"Well, [redacted] came in, he was more focused on the kids. He had that bouncy thing outside for them to play in. And not only him […] they used to come around on holidays, give out dinners to the families. So people that had no Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner, they'll come around and give out food. So people like that. Yeah, they looked out."*

We heard in other focus groups and from survey respondents an appreciation of both candidates and organizations that were providing needed services throughout the year, particularly those serving children. "*But if you have people that come out and do stuff for the kids, like the biker boys and stuff. They do stuff like perform and stuff like that, like, back to school events.*"

In addition to specific activities mentioned by respondents, including food drives, school supply giveaways, mentoring programs, rides to the polls efforts, and voter registration drives, the focus group participants in Shellman articulated the importance of having role models for the community's youth. When speaking of a Fair Count organizer, a respondent noted, *"[her] just being around, working with the kids and just being in the role of a role model activist"* has led to increased engagement from parents, too. *"Really [working] with the kids and with other people, the parents, you know, they allow the kids to come out and that draws their attention to wanna know what they're involved in."*

Some people we talked to even mentioned our work directly:

"I AM HAPPY THAT FAIR COUNT IS IN MY COMMUNITY. EVERYONE I KNOW APPRECIATES HAVING YOU HERE."

"LAST YEAR I MOVED AND WAS CONFUSED ABOUT WHERE MY FAMILY NEEDED TO GO TO VOTE. I GOT THE INFORMATION I NEEDED FROM A FAIR COUNT ORGANIZER. THANK YOU."

"I DO NOT ATTEND A CHURCH AND I AM NOT KNOWLEDGEABLE OF ANY COMMUNITY GROUPS OR AGENCIES THAT ARE DOING THIS WORK. HOWEVER, I HAVE HEARD OF FAIR COUNT."

# 3. FINDINGS

The above sections summarized how we approached this project and main takeaways we found regarding the 2022 midterm. In the sections below, we highlight observations based on our conversations and interviews about how non-voters and voters think about voting.

## NON-VOTERS

### THERE'S A PERVASIVE LACK OF TRUST IN VOTING

When talking to non-voters, the most frequently expressed sentiment was a skepticism about voting being a viable mechanism for change. Voting doesn't work (15 of 72 surveys) and unkept promises (12 of 72) were the most common reasons given (see Figure 11). Often, these responses were from interviewees who rarely vote or who have never voted, perhaps suggesting that they are waiting to see examples of voting "working" before deciding to participate.

### FIGURE 11. FREQUENCY TAGS RELATED TO DISTRUST

|  | Non-Voters | Voters |
|---|---|---|
| Voting doesn't work / hoax | 15 | 3 |
| Follow through / Unkept promises | 12 | 17 |
| Distrust national politics | 7 | 3 |
| Representation | 5 | 9 |

*"I see people voting, but I don't see any changes that can help the ordinary person. It is like the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. I just could not see my vote making a difference."*

*"I never see anything happen in my community."*

*"I didn't vote because of a lack of trust in the system and nothing [ever] gets done."*

Contributing to these feelings of stagnation are promises made by candidates that interviewees don't see coming to fruition, leading to further skepticism. Should one participate in an election, some participants expressed a lack of faith in candidates fulfilling their campaign pledges.

*"Candidates make a lot of promises instead of focusing on the one thing they will deliver on."*

*"You can't make a difference if the candidates don't do as they promise. I am a 40-year-old veteran who has done 2 tours in Iraq. People keep fighting and voting for the same old things and nothing changes. You vote for people in all the elections, and they make promises they do not keep. So in the midterm election, I decided not to vote. My entire family voted, but I didn't."*

Another non-voter talked about the persistence of issues that can be generational: *"Still dealing with the same issues that my great grandparents dealt with . . . less mouth moving and more getting things done. Solve some of these problems with Black people and they will come out and vote in droves."*

During a focus group in Dawson, a participant made an appeal for candidates to *"just be honest"* and not to make promises that they can't keep. This was agreed upon by the four other participants. One participant shared, *"they say, 'I can do this, I can do that' but they gotta go through other people. So you gotta give them a chance but to know that someone is trying, it will mean a lot to the people. Just show us that you're trying."*

There were multiple references to a broader distrust in voting as an institution. One survey respondent was a frequent voter who had become disengaged and was now "*totally fed up*" with voting. A respondent shared, *"the election is full of criminals. They don't care what the public needs. I would like to go out and feel good about voting again."* Another echoed a similar thought, *"I didn't vote because they pick who they want anyway. They cheat!"*

In 4 of the 7 in-person focus groups we conducted, participants talked about this type of institutional distrust and conspiracy, using words like "rigged, " "hoax, " and "fake." In Bibb, a general discussion of voting led one participant to bring up questions about the electoral college, an emergent theme in multiple interviews: *"I feel like it's a hoax, because like the last one it was more like the electors, they go based on the electors for each state. Who [are they]? How do you guys sit there in that timeframe and know all of the votes at one time? They already know who's gonna win before anybody."*

A non-voter in Dawson recounted during a 1:1 interview that people in her community sometimes say, *"Why vote? It's not gonna mean anything. They gonna do what they wanna do."*

**These combined feelings of stagnation, frustration, unkept promises, and lack of confidence in the voting process have left non-voters in a state of distrust in democracy that needs to be addressed.[10]**

## NON-VOTERS WANT TO SEE THE TANGIBLE IMPACT OF THEIR VOTE

Despite the themes of distrust and frustration with voting already discussed, there's opportunity for non-voters to be motivated by policies that make a tangible difference in people's lives. The most common response we heard to what would make non-voters more likely to vote in the future was "seeing my vote make a difference in the community" (26 of 72 surveys), followed by "a promise to take action on an issue" (18 of 72 surveys). These reasons far outpaced other options that were more candidate-specific (see Figure 12). Just 3 non-voters mentioned that motivation to vote for a specific candidate would be a leading factor in them changing their voting behavior. Interestingly, this was the case for voters as well. In general, future voting was most often predicated on a desire for impact and improvement in people's lives, rather than being tied to individual candidates and their platforms.

---

10    The perceived lack of trust in the institution of voting coincides with a decline in all American institutions that happened after 2020. (https://news.gallup.com/poll/394283/confidence-institutions-down-average-new-low.aspx).

**FIGURE 12. WHAT WOULD MAKE YOU MOST LIKELY TO VOTE?**

|  | Non-Voters | Voters |
|---|---|---|
| Seeing my vote making a difference in my community | 26 | 134 |
| A promise to take action on an issue | 16 | 29 |
| Better understanding the differences between candidates | 4 | 11 |
| Motivation to vote for a specific candidate | 2 | 8 |

Timothy said, *"I refuse to vote because no change is happening . . . I would like to see these elected officials take charge and help the community; I may start back voting then."* Other interviewees expressed similar thoughts: *"If I [were] to vote, it would be to have elected officials give more concern to the community needs. [I] really want to see a return [of] me voting."*

The specific issues and policies discussed were rarely the issues dominating national headlines, like immigration, gun control, or reproductive access, but rather local issues that people want addressed. A community member mentioned the water in her building having a "bad smell" that local officials didn't take seriously. Wanting to see local change and "helping the community" was a frequent refrain. In Dawson, there was there was significant dialog about local infrastructure and needed road repairs:

*"Down where we live at, our roads [are] messed up. When you go to the good section of Dawson, with the nice houses and stuff, their roads are straight. But down by where we stay at there's nothing but potholes."*
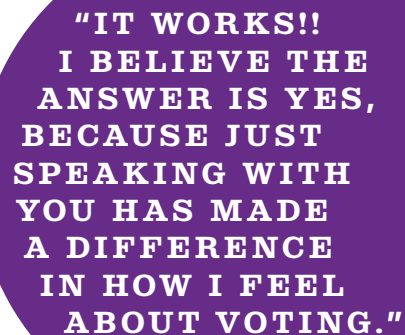
Later when discussing changes they would like to see, another speaker added, *"If somebody was homeless — they don't even have a shelter or nothing down here for anybody to go to. You have to go all the way to Albany. Why do people have to leave from where they're from to go to a whole other city, just to have someone. [You're] right here!"*

Several interviewees addressed financial stress: *"They may give you a little extra on food stamps, but then they take it right back."* Discussions of issues like taxation often took a pointedly local turn. *"Every year property tax goes up, car insurance goes up, everything but paychecks. Most of [property tax] is school tax in [redacted] county and who is getting all that money? And what are they doing with all that money?"*

In several cases, non-voters who didn't participate in the highly publicized Georgia midterm election were informed about political candidates and government officials locally. Focus group participants in Crisp and Sumter highlighted what county commissioners were saying on Facebook or conversed about the background of mayoral candidates, for example. Local politics and local impact were often brought up as being more important than national politics.

*"On the big [elections for] president and governors — I don't believe in none of that. Now, locally — sheriff, judge, mayors, the school board — all [of] them, [because] that's what I think matters."*

**"IT WORKS!! I BELIEVE THE ANSWER IS YES, BECAUSE JUST SPEAKING WITH YOU HAS MADE A DIFFERENCE IN HOW I FEEL ABOUT VOTING."**

## NON-VOTERS ARE HOPEFUL ABOUT COLLECTIVE ACTION

Many of the reasons given for not voting were about individual votes not being able to make change – *"I felt my vote wouldn't make a difference"* and *"I guess that I didn't vote because I felt my vote wouldn't matter."* This perspective tracks with some of the systematic reasons given for not voting — how could any individual voter bring about change in a corrupt system? Despite those feelings, non-voters overwhelmingly resonated with the survey question about collective action. 26 of 29 interviewees who responded to the question agreed that framing voting as "an act of community" instead of "an individual action" would strengthen people's perception and willingness to vote. Interviewees who voted shared this perspective.

A respondent, who has never voted before, said, *"Yes, I would like to see the community to come together to help each other vote."* Another, who didn't vote due to a criminal record, added, *"Yes, if we made voting a community effort, more people would be interested in the value of the community."* A non-voter who self-identified as "not a political person" agreed that *"if the community voted as a collective, there would be more services for food and services for the disabled."*

Other examples include:

*"I did not vote because I am a convicted felon. Since I left I left prison my focus has been on bettering myself for my community, so if I was to vote [I'd want] my community to feel the effects."*

*"It's one thing for one person to stand up for their beliefs but when it becomes a collective effort/belief you can no longer be ignored."*

These responses suggest disaffected voters might be convinced to re-engage as part of a collective effort to accomplish something for the community and build power locally. A participant in our Faith focus group put it like this: *"We wanted people [to] trust the system and see this as a community effort. But sometimes when these types of things [like election integrity] come up, it makes it hard for people to even want to vote. And unfortunately, if you can't change your mind to vote then that's just unfortunate. But you know, just trying to start on a grassroots level [and make] sure the people in your community vote, is probably the best thing we can do to try to overcome that."*
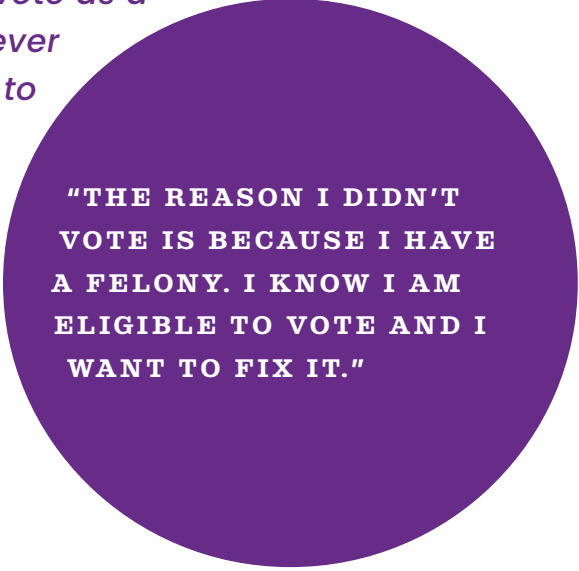
## BARRIERS TO VOTING EXIST, BUT THEY ARE OFTEN SUBTLE

Voting was seen as being only slightly more difficult for non-voters compared to voters on our 1–5 scale (with 1 being the easiest); 1.9 for non-voters compared to 1.2 for voters. Of the 72 people we talked to who didn't vote, only one person mentioned wanting to vote but discovering she was ineligible due to a specific issue with her ID. Another non-voter was unable to vote due to the distance from her polling location, a reality that many rural voters face. She reported, *"the polling precinct was very far from me and by the time I was getting off the polls were closing."* These obstacles to voting were likely exacerbated by recent changes in Georgia's

election laws. In addition, we also heard from 5 people that they were disenfranchised due to felony convictions. Four of those 5 expressed a desire to vote or be more involved with their communities going forward:

*"I'd like more information on how I can vote as a felon. You are the first person who has ever told me I may be able to get registered to vote as a convicted felon."*

*"I didn't follow [the election]...I recently [lost the right to vote]. I will start back following elections. That's an issue to me because I'm passing up on the opportunity to be heard."*

**"THE REASON I DIDN'T VOTE IS BECAUSE I HAVE A FELONY. I KNOW I AM ELIGIBLE TO VOTE AND I WANT TO FIX IT."**

It's worth noting that these individuals were mostly reached by cold calls to the voter file, and although they aren't a statistically significant sample of the population, their stories serve as a compelling reminder of the 234,000 people in Georgia who aren't eligible to vote due to felony records.[11]

Other barriers to voting included personal health and care-giving responsibilities, with 6 individuals indicating that their health prevented them from participating.

*"At the time, I was in the hospital having my toe amputated. My health was of the utmost importance and I wasn't focusing on anything else."*
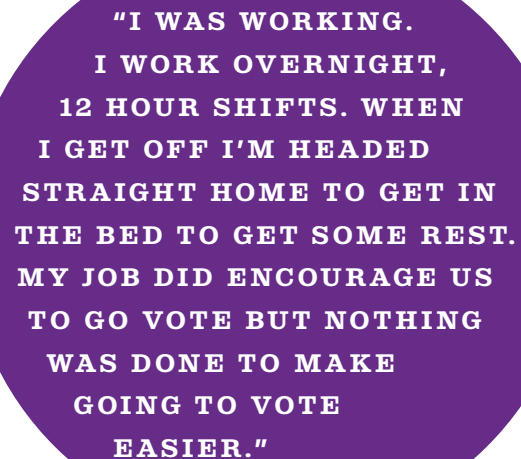
*"I usually always vote, but this time I was tied up with caring for my mentally challenged son, which left me with very little time to do anything else. I will definitely vote in the future. Making it easier to vote by mail would make it much easier for me to vote."*

---

11    https://www.sentencingproject.org/app/uploads/2023/01/Georgia-Voting-Rights-for-People-with-Felony-Convictions.pdf

Six interviewees expressed that the obligation to work was a higher priority than finding time to vote. *"I didn't vote because my employer would not let us off to vote. I feel there should be a law that makes jobs allow employees time off for voting."*

Overall, 16 of 72 non-voters referenced an external factor that prevented them from participating. Some of these barriers exist due to challenges meeting basic needs, like health and financial stability. In an environment where voting is seen, at best, as providing medium-to-long term benefits for a community, it's maybe not surprising that many people prioritize their immediate needs before thinking about voting as a pathway to change. A 1:1 conversation with a voter in Dawson provides an example of these competing priorities:

**"I WAS WORKING. I WORK OVERNIGHT, 12 HOUR SHIFTS. WHEN I GET OFF I'M HEADED STRAIGHT HOME TO GET IN THE BED TO GET SOME REST. MY JOB DID ENCOURAGE US TO GO VOTE BUT NOTHING WAS DONE TO MAKE GOING TO VOTE EASIER."**

*"At the time I was in the hospital having my toe amputated. My health was of the utmost importance and I wasn't focusing on anything else."*

*"They had started cutting hours [at work]. So that particular month, that was my month to like, just get my money. They were doing overtime, so I just felt like that was my time to get extra money. When I get off work, I have to go pick up my baby from school...have to help with homework. Like I said, I'm a single mama, I [have] to go home and cook and stuff like that. [And you know, the voting] lines used to be long back in the days."*

## VOTING IS SEEN AS A MECHANISM FOR CHANGE

Voters and non-voters alike expressed a desire to see change in their communities — whether that meant fixing the pothole on their street, creating new homeless shelters nearby, or making it easier for their voices to be heard. What distinguished voters' responses from those of non-voters, however, was the underlying belief that voting was a viable mechanism for bringing about change. Repeatedly, we heard from voters that they viewed voting as a pathway to change, enabling you to shape the future:

*"If you don't vote, you don't get a chance to decide what direction the system goes. Vote for the best person to represent your goals."*

*"I voted so I would be part of making a change that I hope will be a positive one."*

For these voters, the question of voting is almost self-evident. Voting is seen as a necessary step in achieving change, even if it's not the only one. *"Many things need to change in our communities and the best way to make change happen is to use our vote."*

104 of the 200 voters we spoke with considered voting a "pathway", compared to just 9 of the 72 non-voters (see Figure 13). It wasn't just "super" voters, or voters who always vote, who expressed these feelings. 10 of 22 infrequent voters who participated in the 2022 midterm election also made a connection with voting being a "pathway" to change. This trend also exists across voters of all ages.

### FIGURE 13. FREQUENCY OF TAGS RELATED TO CHANGE

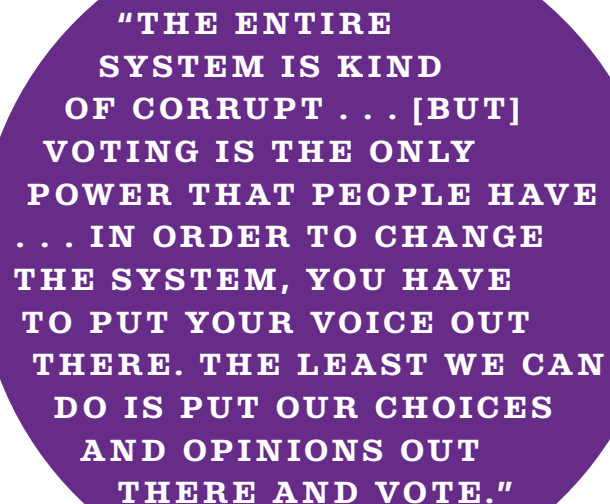|  | Non-Voters | Voters |
|---|---|---|
| Pathway | 9 | 104 |
| Self Expression | 3 | 62 |
| Action ("Do something") | 1 | 26 |

Two other themes related to voting as a mechanism for change emerged that are worth mentioning. Of the 200 voters, 62 mentioned voting as an act of self-expression, often using the word "voice," another 26 brought up reasoning that we associate with taking action, and best summed up by the reasoning of "instead of complaining, I have to vote."

*"Trying to let my people see [their votes] and make their voices heard and be proud of who you vote for."*

Another voter added, *"if we remain silent, that means we are happy with the ways things are. If that is not the way we feel, then we have got to vote."*

Even voters who were skeptical of the system identified voting as an essential form of communication.

For some, voting was viewed as a positive action worth taking. The key distinction here was that voting is a way of "doing something" instead of just talking about a problem and therefore "doing nothing." One voter said, *"I feel that instead of complaining about the conditions that affect our lives, we have to do something. For me, voting is doing something."*

**"THE ENTIRE SYSTEM IS KIND OF CORRUPT . . . [BUT] VOTING IS THE ONLY POWER THAT PEOPLE HAVE . . . IN ORDER TO CHANGE THE SYSTEM, YOU HAVE TO PUT YOUR VOICE OUT THERE. THE LEAST WE CAN DO IS PUT OUR CHOICES AND OPINIONS OUT THERE AND VOTE."**

Another agreed, *"I voted because I felt it was very important for minority, working class people such as myself to step up and do. Something to make a change instead of sitting back and complaining. I also encouraged others to vote."*

In some ways, voting is akin to "getting a seat at the table." A voter in the Savannah focus group put it this way:

*"If I didn't vote and something came up, I can't give my opinion because I didn't vote."*

*"We can't just sit around and complain about the way our community or country is being run. If we see problems, we have an obligation to do something about them. History teaches us that voting changes things, and it makes a difference."*

## FAITH IS A POINT OF CONNECTION

Overall, voters were far more likely than non-voters to mention knowing of people or organizations doing work to strengthen civic engagement in their communities, 37% to 17%. Among those who mentioned at least one partner, 48% mentioned a church or other faith institution. Except for one non-voter, these were all voters.

A voter named Georgia talked about the central role churches play in the community:

*"I can recall that back in the day everything important to a community was decided within the walls of the church. That was the main gathering place, and people placed great value and trust in church leadership. At that time people were more motivated to vote and to get involved in civic activities."*

Several non-voters also acknowledged the important ways a church can engage in getting out the vote (GOTV). In our faith focus group in Baldwin County, one non-voter talked about the ways a church can support GOTV, while being careful not to cross a line into candidate advocacy or dictating people's personal beliefs. *"Not telling them who to vote for, but just saying, 'Hey, these are the people on the ballot.' So they're kind of aware of what's going on or if they need to know if certain ordinances are being passed or certain laws are coming up, at least explain the laws to them because some of the verbage can be very confusing when you get into the polls and you need to understand. So maybe just breaking down what it means in more layman terms."* She affirmed that church outreach is a strong way *"to reach more people"* in the community.

## VOTERS CONSIDER THEIR LEGACY — PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE — IN DECIDING TO VOTE

Legacy surfaced from our conversations as an important motivation for voters. At times, voters were focused on maintaining past traditions and honoring sacrifices made by ancestors; others were committed to fulfilling responsibilities to their current communities; and many were hoping to shape a better future for coming generations.

For some voters — young and old — voting is just a habit or tradition. One 90-year-old shared, *"Since the day I was able to vote, I've been doing it. I am not about to stop now!"* Voting is a newer, but necessary tradition for one 29-year-old: *"I've been voting since I was just out of high school, and will keep on voting because it's necessary."*

Many voters discussed the influence their families had on their commitment to voting. For one, voting is part of her "family culture." Another voter shared that she grew up watching her family vote and seeing how important important it was to them. Sometimes, family tradition took the form of not voting. One never-voter shared, *"I didn't vote because I have never been encouraged to vote. My mom doesn't vote, so neither do I."* Others, like a participant in our virtual focus group, shared that they felt their families didn't give them enough agency to decide to vote for themselves:

*"[My grandmother] always made sure that I voted. She was like, 'make sure you go vote!' And she'll call me every day. . . I really felt like I was just kind of forced. I mean, I don't mind voting. I just want to know what I'm doing. Like when I be in there, I'll be stuck and lost cause like some of them names, I don't even know who I'm voting for."* The participant reflected further, *"If she would have just let me [go] on my own, you know, let me take some time to figure out who I'm [voting], what I'm voting for, why I'm voting for, instead of being forced to vote . . . I wanna know more about these people, you know?"*

50 of the 200 voters invoked feelings of obligation or responsibility to vote (see Figure 14), often framing voting as a duty. *"I voted because I feel it is my duty to vote. Also at an early age I was taught the importance of voting."* Another echoed, *"I voted because it is my patriotic duty."* This was not a phrase that came up among non-voters.

**FIGURE 14. FREQUENCY OF TAGS RELATED TO LEGACY**

|  | Non-Voters | Voters |
|---|---|---|
| **Obligation / Responsibility** | 0 | 50 |
| **Priority +** | 3 | 49 |
| **Tradition** | 5 | 48 |
| **Right** | 2 | 38 |
| **Engaged** | 4 | 29 |
| **Party** | 1 | 5 |
| **Geography** | 2 | 3 |
| **Disengaged** | 23 | 2 |
| **Faith** | 2 | 2 |
| **Priority -** | 39 | 1 |
| **Veteran** | 2 | 1 |
| **Class** | 1 | 1 |
| **Equality** | 0 | 1 |

Many voters also emphasized that voting is a hard-won right: "*I voted because we had to fight for the right to vote and that keeps me voting time and time again.*" Interestingly, 39 of the 48 voters who invoked tradition were over 50 years old. In particular, most of the respondents who referred to the civil rights movement and the sacrifices of ancestors were over 50.

*"I voted because as an African American, my people were deprived of the right to vote for so very long. A great price has been paid for us to get to where we are today. Now that I have that right and opportunity, I will definitely use it."*

**"I VOTED AND WILL CONTINUE TO VOTE BECAUSE IT IS MY RIGHT. MY ANCESTORS WORKED HARD FOR US TO GET TO HERE. AND VOTING DETERMINES OUR FUTURE — OUR FUTURE IS AT STAKE!"**

*"My vote is very important to me, my family, my community and our nation. It is also my earned right that so many others before me suffered and died for. Therefore, I always choose to vote."*

Numerous voters mentioned wanting to make their lives, as well as the lives of their families and communities, better right now.

**"I WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN MY CHILDREN'S FUTURE."**

*"I have always voted, and I've been doing it for a very long time. I am concerned about what is going on in my community and my nation. If we don't vote, we miss the opportunity to help ourselves."*

*"Plain and simple, I am concerned about my community and feel that if anything happens on the national level it will affect me, my family, and my community. We have to think about voting local and nationally."*

*"I don't belong to any political organization, but I am a private, country citizen who is concerned about my family, many of whom are aging, and the younger family members who are coming after me. It would be a good thing to leave our community in a better condition than it was when I was born. The only way to do that is to get involved in what's going on around me and to do my duty by voting."*

In addition to wanting to participate in shaping change, community leaders, parents, and grandparents discussed the responsibility they feel as role models and caregivers to future generations.

*"I voted because as a Black man and a pastor, it is my duty to be the model for those that I influence."*

One young mother commented, *"I want to make a difference in my children's future."*

*"I voted because I am an old man and need to be a good example for my kids and grandkids. I also want to upgrade my community."*

*"I voted because I want my children and grandchildren to have a better future."*

*"I voted because it is important to me right now and for my future. While we may not fully see the impact of our vote at the present time, it is important to vote as we look to the future that lies ahead for those who are coming after us. Voting is something we owe to ourselves and to society."*

Time and again, voters expressed that their priority is investing in the youth and in creating safe spaces for future generations.

*"All these people, the old heads have been here like OG right there, been here for years. They've been voting every year, but he ain't seen no change yet. So while the young people will be like, 'well damn, they ain't do nothing all this time - what make you think they gonna do something now?' And I keep talking about, 'Oh, it [takes] time to progress[...]. But how much time do you think we got? We ain't got all this time to just sit and wait. We gotta try to see if you can do something. No, get out there and do something. Period. For the kids."*

One virtual focus group participant highlighted the disparity between her vision and the vision of elected officials shaping her community:

*"In Albany, they just took away the skating rink. Then you put up another car wash, like — we don't even have that many cars for y'all to be putting up these damn car washes. There's nothing here for the children to do. You know what I'm saying? Put up a youth center with some basketball courts, make an indoor football arena or something. Like we got all this land around here, all this country space and y'all are doing nothing for these children.*

*And that's my problem. All these politicians care about is social security, health insurance, dental insurance, fixing the roads and how they gonna stay in power. And I'm worried about the community, the space that my children are gonna grow up in. Like, my children walk down the street and it's 3, 4 liquor stores to your right and your left, a Dollar General, a Dollar Tree and a Family Dollar. You know what I'm saying? I don't understand it, like, it's not making any sense. Why are you not putting things that are more productive for a society? Like, I feel like they're just trying to suppress us, drown us. Like, this is what you need to see."*

# 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Below are recommendations that we've compiled based on the survey responses recorded, combined with the collective feedback and input of the entire Fair Count team, who was so instrumental in conducting this research. The recommendations are organized for various audience groups: Campaigns, Elected Officials, Advocacy Organizations, and Media. Our hope is that these actionable takeaways can be utilized by different stakeholders directly, or at the very least, provide a starting point to consider how to better serve voters in Georgia.

## CAMPAIGNS

1. **Set concrete, achievable goals and stick to your word.** The people we interviewed are clearly skeptical of candidate promises that end up being "broken" from their perspective. In some cases, there was acknowledgement that progress is complicated and can often be blocked by others, but participants strongly expresssed a desire for transparency and realistic examples of how their daily lives can be improved by candidate platforms rather than a sweeping vision of change.

2. **Voters want to see candidates "in person" as much as possible.** We heard this centered around the importance of activities like town halls and local community events where people can ask questions and get direct answers. When in-person outreach isn't possible, a secondary option may be the creative use of social media, which was mentioned as a tool to better communicate with voters who might be skeptical of information disseminated by traditional news outlets.

3. **Negative campaigning and attacking opponents can be a double edged sword.** While these strategies may be helpful during an individual campaign, it's possible that personal attacks, are contributing to voter distrust in the political system. Many non-voters talked about being confused about who to vote for and disappointed in mutual candidate attacks.

4. **Understand the identities of the community that you're trying to engage.** We found important nuances between voters who are motivated by responsibility (voting to honor my ancestors or voting for my children) versus those who feel that voting as obligation is outdated and ill-suited for the realities on the ground. Candidates could stand out by acknowledging these differing cross-generational perspectives.

5. **Voters repeatedly requested thoughtfully researched reminders about the logistics of voting — time, place, and process — and recurring conversations about committing to vote.** Even in a highly publicized midterm election, some voters genuinely didn't remember if they voted or indicated intent but "life got busy." Competing priorities in the lives of voters (often health care and focusing on work) took precedence over voting. It may be helpful, especially when engaging high-opportunity voters who vote less often, to acknowledge these competing priorities during campaign season.

## ELECTED OFFICIALS

1. **Make government services a priority.** Particularly at the local level, constituents noted when services were administered inequitably, often bringing up community priorities that had been ignored (such as fixing potholes and building playgrounds) as their motivation to vote. Talk about those wins, even if they're small, in a way that shows you're making a difference and improving the lives of community members. Some voters acknowledged that change is hard, but that they just want to see the effort being made.

2. **Find ways to communicate more directly with voters.** People had positive memories and associations with politicians who were visible in the community compared to those who were not. Stories about elected officials who "walk down Main Street," hosted annual events to give back to the community, or who took a moment to help someone "tie a tie" are fondly remembered. Making constituent services a priority and collecting community input where possible are additional important touch points that would improve communication and help build trust with voters.

3. **union action Be as transparent as possible.** Explaining how votes are counted, how the money is being spent, and what problems you're trying to solve, could go a long way to rebuilding trust in elections, government and democracy in general. Embracing new forms of media and outreach strategies to communicate with constituents may be helpful here, too. Many default to the position that "government is corrupt" and are open to being proven wrong.

## ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS

1. **Create a communication plan that is tailored to the communities that you are engaging and embedded in.** People are looking for more targeted engagement that showcases an understanding of their communities and their unique needs. This could help cut through the noise of a busy campaign environment with a lot of repetitive messaging. For example, we found important generational differences when talking about voting as a way to honor the past.

2. **Invest in compelling civic education that goes beyond GOTV.** The best practices we uncovered involved reminders to vote, sample ballots, and social pressure messaging, but many voters and non-voters alike mentioned wanting a better understanding of the voting process, the candidates, and how an election might impact their lives directly. While digital tools can be helpful here, creating offline materials and in-person programming were identified as needs by the mostly rural community members that spoke with us.

3. **Show voters that voting can, and has lead to progress.** There's a need to combat both cynicism and disinformation around voting. Leveraging historical examples of systematic historical change or recent examples, like the rise of labor union action, could prove helpful here. Finding pathways to connect these tangible success stories to current community experience may be crucial in beginning to address current nonpartisan local issues through civic engagement.

4. **Incorporate community voices into your organization's strategy and research by leaning into recorded focus groups.** We feel that just about everyone could benefit from these small-group conversations as a way to learn directly from the communities we serve. These focus groups were often transformative to our thinking about our work and they also seemed to be well received by community members as a meaningful way to engage. The transcripts of these conversations provide an extremely rich dataset that goes beyond traditional voter contact metrics.

5. **Create ways for organizers or staff on the ground to share their expertise and be involved in project planning and execution from the beginning.** We largely benefited from organizer input during all aspects of this research, and furthermore, couldn't have collected this data without their skilled organizing on the phone and in the communities that they know best.

6. **Explore ways to incorporate collective action themes into our work instead of just focusing on the individual.** People seemed open to talking about voting as a community action and a way to build local power. Even voters who didn't participate in 2022, were open to the idea of thinking about coming together as a group to make a difference, recognizing the "strength in numbers." This aligns with research by HIT Strategies and others who have explored power-frame messaging. Working this into voter contact scripts and materials seems promising and is worthy of further testing.

7. **Prioritize in-person events and experiences that show a long-term investment in the community.** Civic engagement that meets people on their terms can help establish organizations as trusted messengers in the community who will be around after an election is over. Things like activities for children, food drives, and back-to-school events are highly valued. Finding ways to recreate this support digitally when in-person programming isn't always possible is important too.

## MEDIA

1. **Find stories that go beyond the horse race reporting of who is winning or losing or the latest personal attack.** Respondents expressed an interest in more information on the impact of voting, especially locally, and a desire to better understand candidate platforms and how different positions might impact their lives.

2. **Create a plan for civic education that can help rebuild trust in the voting process.** Sharing key election dates and deadlines is a needed contribution, but we also found voters looking for deeper information on the roles and responsibilities of various offices. Many people spoke about understanding that local elections are important, but how those elected officials impact their lives was less clear. There were also questions raised about the administrative processes that governs the determination of eligibility, counting votes, and declaring a winner. Content that explains the civic process could help rebuild trust and replace misinformation from less reliable sources.

# APPENDIX

## APPENDIX 1A.

## SURVEY QUESTIONS FOR COLD OUTREACH, SCHEDULED 1:1S, AND EVENTS

**To get things started, how closely were you following the November Midterm election overall? Were you paying attention to the candidates, commercials, etc.?**

**Do you mind sharing if you voted in the November election? [Open ended, but coded in the form]**

- ○ Refused
- ○ Didn't vote
- ○ Voted
- ○ Not registered to vote
- ○ Don't remember

**Do you mind sharing why you did (or didn't) vote?**

**If there was an election next week, which of the following reasons would make you most likely to vote? [Select one]**

- ○ A promise to take action on an issue
- ○ Understanding better the differences between candidates
- ○ Motivation to vote for a specific candidate
- ○ Seeing my vote making a difference in my community
- ○ Other: _ _ _ _

**Following up on the above, can you explain more about why you chose that option? [Open ended]**

**In what ways, if any, were you contacted by organizations about voting in the Midterm election? [Select all that apply]**

- ○ Online ads
- ○ Mail
- ○ TV ads
- ○ Event invitation
- ○ Radio
- ○ Door conversation
- ○ Text message
- ○ Phone call
- ○ Other: _ _ _ _

**If you were contacted by an organization about the election, what type of information did they provide? [Select all that apply]**

- ○ Reminder to vote
- ○ Info on why voting matters
- ○ Info on voting for the formerly incarcerated
- ○ How to register to vote
- ○ Info on what different elected officials do
- ○ How to vote early/absentee
- ○ Where candidates stand on issues
- ○ Other: _ _ _ _ _

**You just shared how you were contacted before the election and what information was provided. Is that different from what you would like to see? Are there outreach strategies, for example, that you think work better than others? [Open ended]**

**If you voted in November, how hard was it to vote on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=easy)? If you didn't vote, how hard do you think it would be to vote? [Likert]**

**Can you share more about why you chose that number on the scale? [Open ended]**

**In the most recent election is there anything that would have made voting easier? [Select all that apply]**

- ○ More weekend voting
- ○ More dropboxes available
- ○ Making absentee voting easier
- ○ More info on where candidates stand on issues
- ○ Better outreach from campaigns
- ○ Other: _ _ _ _

**Voting is most often talked about as an individual right and action. If people saw voting more as an act of community and collective action, do you think that could change how the importance of voting is viewed? Please explain. [Open ended]**

**As I mentioned, Fair Count is interested in working with communities to strengthen civic engagement. Are there people doing that type of work in your community and what type of activities are they doing? [Open ended]**

**Thank you for sharing your real experiences with elections with me. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about voting? [Open ended]**

## APPENDIX 1B.

## MODERATOR GUIDE FOR FOCUS GROUPS

Let's start out with an easy fill in the blank question. To me, voting is _____. [Write on paper or post-it in front of you]. Then go around the room and discuss.

Think back to the election we had in November - there were races for governor and a seat in the Senate. How did you hear about what the issues were and who the candidates were?

Let's talk about the election itself. We wanted to talk today specifically to those who did not vote in November. Do you mind sharing why you didn't vote?

In the next election that comes up, what do you think would be the biggest thing that would make you want to vote in the future?

We talked earlier about how you all heard about the election (candidates, issues). How do you think the current outreach strategy is working to reach the communities that you care about? What could be done differently?

[For Faith focus group] What role does the church play in promoting civic engagement in your experience?

What are the biggest barriers to voting? [E.g. registration, getting information about candidates, transportation to polls, etc.]

Voting is most often talked about as an individual right and action. If people saw voting more as an act of community and collective action, do you think that could change how the importance of voting is viewed? Please explain.

We've covered a lot of ground. Is there anything that we haven't talked about related to why you didn't vote or why you might vote in the future that you'd like to share?