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Georgia passes map that aims to gain Republicans a seat in Congress



POLITICS

By **Mark Niesse**, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Updated Nov 22, 2021

Redistricting could give GOP a 9-5 advantage in Georgia

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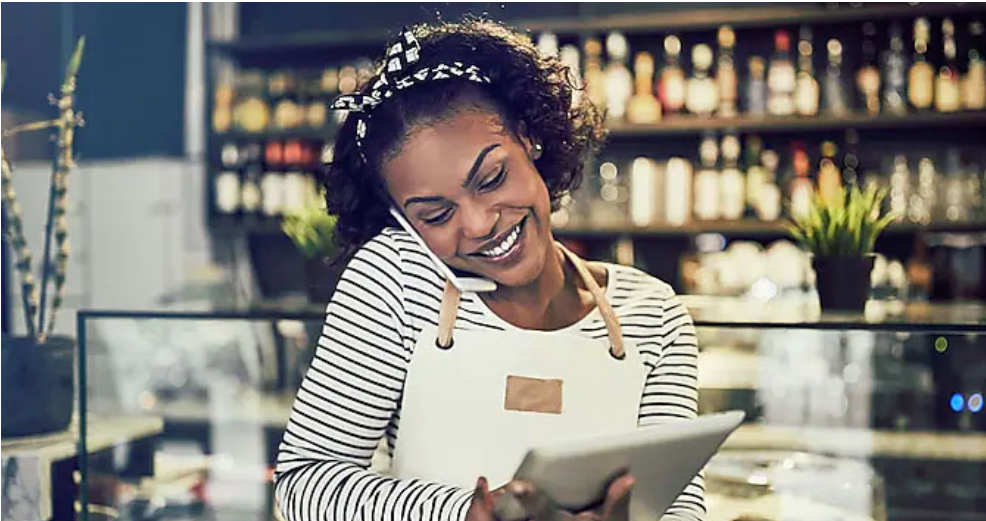
The Georgia General Assembly gave final approval Monday to a political map that positions Republicans to gain a seat in Congress by reshaping a suburban Atlanta district currently represented by Democratic U.S. Rep. Lucy McBath.

The redistricting plan is designed to give Republicans a 9-5 advantage over Democrats in Georgia's congressional delegation, an increase from the GOP's 8-6 lead. Winning another seat in Georgia would help Republicans take a majority in Congress after next year's elections.

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The Georgia House voted almost entirely along party lines, 96-68, on Monday to send the congressional redistricting map to Republican Gov. Brian Kemp for his signature. Lawsuits to overturn the map could soon follow, alleging it dilutes minority voting strength.

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The new congressional map aims to ensure Republican victories before a single vote is cast in next year’s elections. Though Georgia’s voters are split between the two political parties, none of the state’s 14 congressional districts would be competitive, according to estimates by The Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

District partisan shifts

District	Incumbent	2020 election result	Projected partisan lean
1	Buddy Carter	R +16	R +15
2	Sanford Bishop	D +18	D +10
3	Drew Ferguson	R +30	R +34
4	Hank Johnson	D +60	D +58

District	Incumbent	2020 election result	Projected partisan lean
5	Nikema Williams	D +70	D +68
6	Lucy McBath	D +10	R +15
7	Carolyn Bourdeaux	D +2	D +22
8	Austin Scott	R +30	R +31
9	Andrew Clyde	R +58	R +43
10	Jody Hice	R +24	R +27
11	Barry Loudermilk	R +20	R +20
12	Rick Allen	R +16	R +14
13	David Scott	D +54	D +62
14	Marjorie Taylor Greene	R +50	R +40

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The map redraws the Democratic-leaning district held by McBath, making it more Republican by extending north from metro Atlanta into conservative strongholds in Forsyth and Dawson counties. McBath won reelection last year with 55% of the vote, but under the new map, Republican voters would outnumber Democrats by 15 percentage points in next year's elections, according to the AJC's analysis.

McBath flipped the 6th Congressional District in 2018, winning election in an area that was once a Republican bastion represented by Newt Gingrich, who became speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives and led the GOP to take control of the House in 1994. Now the district is poised to return to Republican representation.

Democratic legislators accused the Republicans of manipulating district lines to gain power, saying the map should more closely reflect Georgia's 50-50 electorate, with an opportunity for each party to win seven seats. But because Republicans control the General Assembly, they had the votes to create the map that gives them 64% of the state's representation in the U.S. House of Representatives.

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State Rep. Mariam Paris, a Democrat from Macon, said the map attempts to unseat McBath, one of two Black women in Georgia’s congressional delegation along with U.S. Rep. Nikema Williams.

“At a time when women are already underrepresented, particularly women of color, we should not be drawing maps that target women incumbents to make it harder for them to run and win in new districts,” Paris said during the House debate. “But the map before us today does exactly that.”

Republican leaders pushed the map through the legislative process in just six days. It was made public on Wednesday, leaving limited time for consideration of a bill that passed without any amendments.

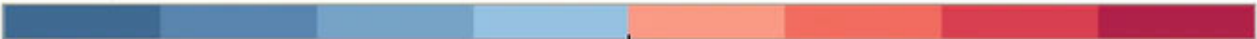
“I heard members standing up here say that we targeted a woman of color. ... It doesn’t work like that,” House Redistricting Chairwoman Bonnie Rich said. “This congressional map is fair, it complies with the law, the Constitution and the Voting Rights Act, regardless of what activists and candidates for statewide office say.”

How 6th and 7th districts could change

< Caption

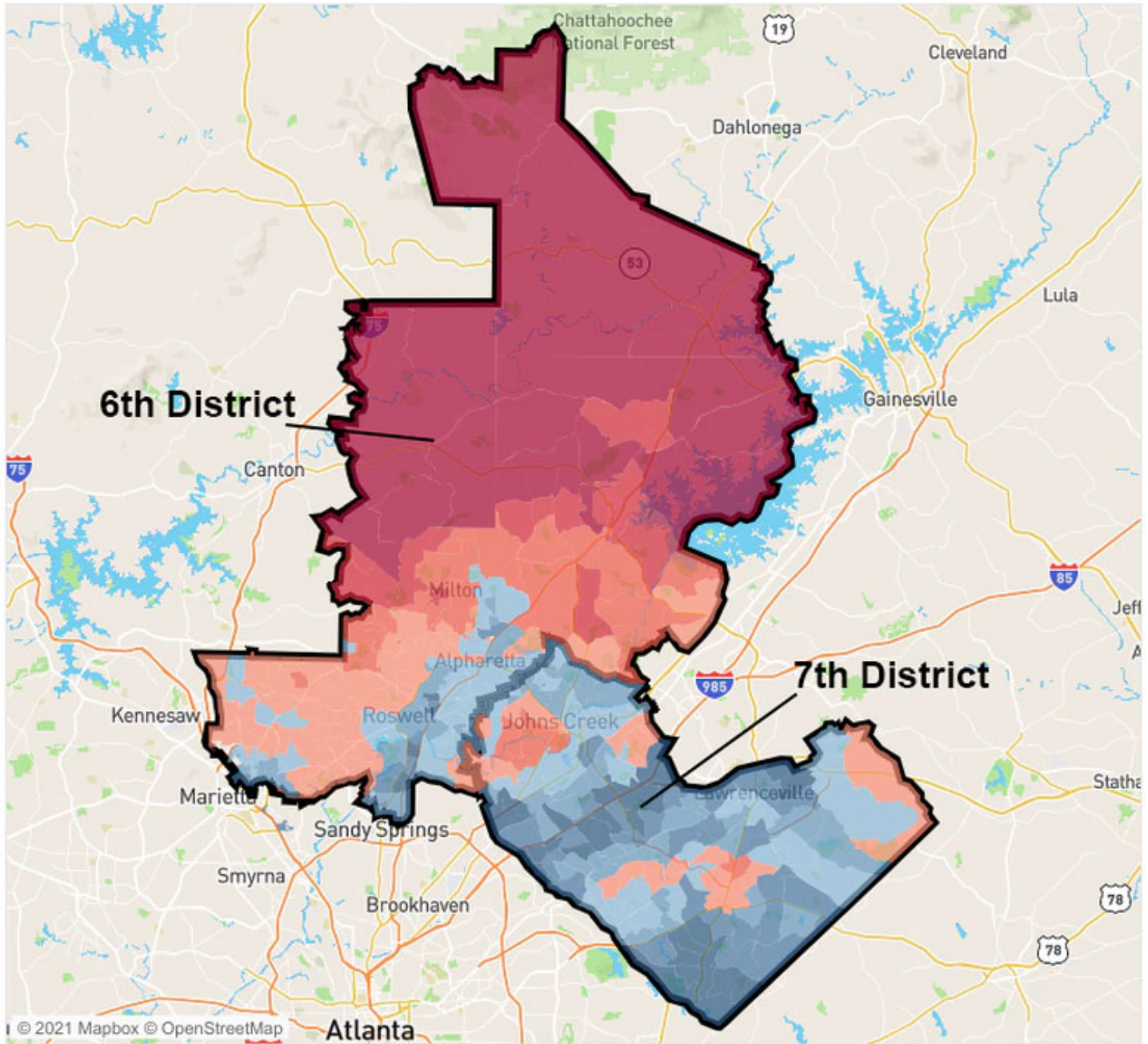
Two of the most competitive districts in the U.S. House could have solid partisan leanings. The 6th would favor Republicans by trading Democratic areas in Cobb, DeKalb and Fulton counties for solid Republican precincts in Cherokee, Dawson and Forsyth counties. The 7th would favor Democrats by losing GOP areas of Forsyth and adding Democratic parts of Gwinnett.

Election margin

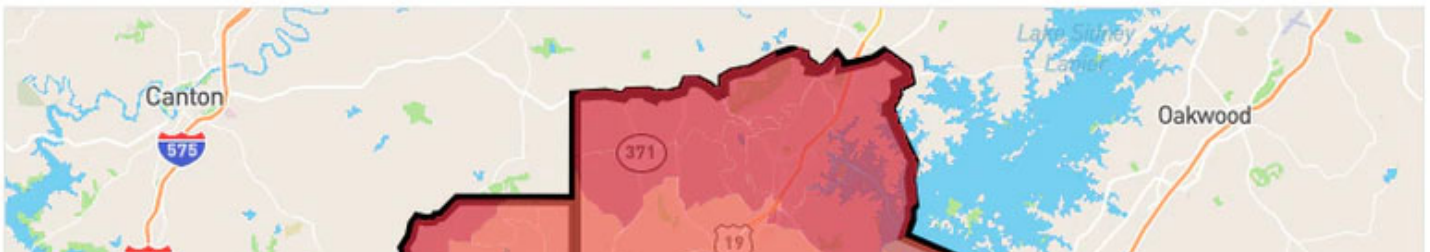


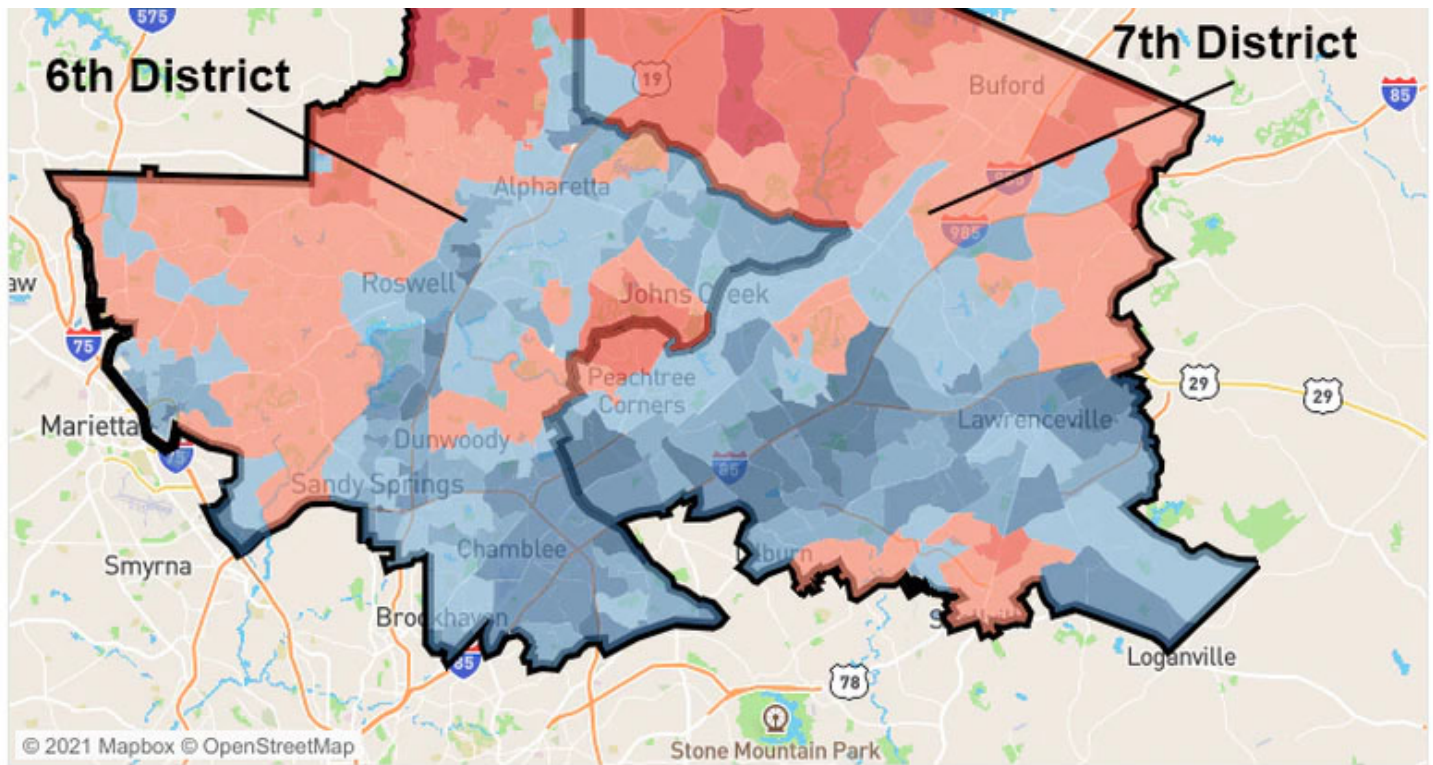
30% 20% 10% 0 10% 20% 30%

Proposed 2021



Current 2020





Source: Georgia secretary of state election data

Credit: Isaac Sabetai

Redistricting occurs once a decade to ensure equal population.

Georgia's population increased by 1 million over the past decade, bringing its total number of residents to 10.7 million, according to the 2020 census. All the population growth was among people of color, and the number of white residents declined.

This year's redistricting, with about 765,136 residents in each of Georgia's 14 districts, is the first since a U.S. Supreme Court ruling brought about the end of federal oversight. Before the 2013 *Shelby v. Holder* decision, states with a history of racial discrimination, including Georgia, were required to obtain federal preclearance before new districts could go into effect.

But states can still be sued over whether redistricting discriminates against voters of color in violation of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Republican legislators who support Georgia's new congressional map have said it's fair and nondiscriminatory.

"I'm assuming that there will be lawsuits filed galore, quickly, and that's fine. There were last time, and they were all dismissed," said House Speaker David Ralston, a Republican from Blue Ridge. "The Supreme Court of the United States has said that redistricting is inherently a political process. And I say that without hanging my head or stammering. I mean, you can't take it out."

Besides changing the electorate in the district McBath represents, the map also makes another congressional district noncompetitive.

U.S. Rep. Carolyn Bourdeaux switched a Gwinnett County-based district to the Democrats with her 51% win last year. The redrawn 7th District would lean 22 percentage points toward Democrats, according to AJC estimates based on voting patterns in the 2020 and 2018 elections.

Immediately after the House voted to approve the new map Monday, McBath announced she would run in the 7th District now held by Bourdeaux.

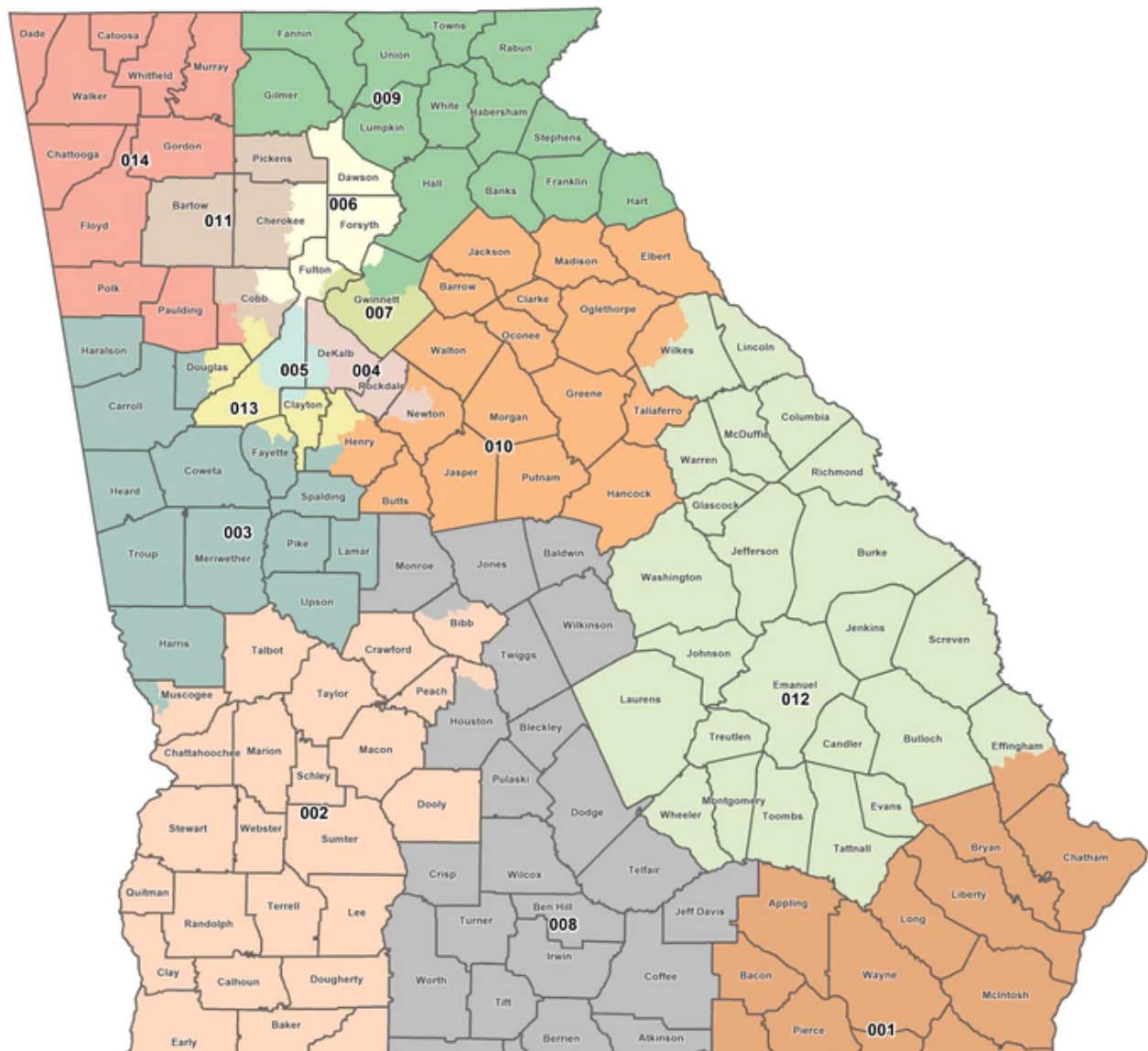
“This map puts power over principles, partisanship over people,” said Minority Leader James Beverly, a Democrat from Macon. “It’s the Republican way or the highway.”

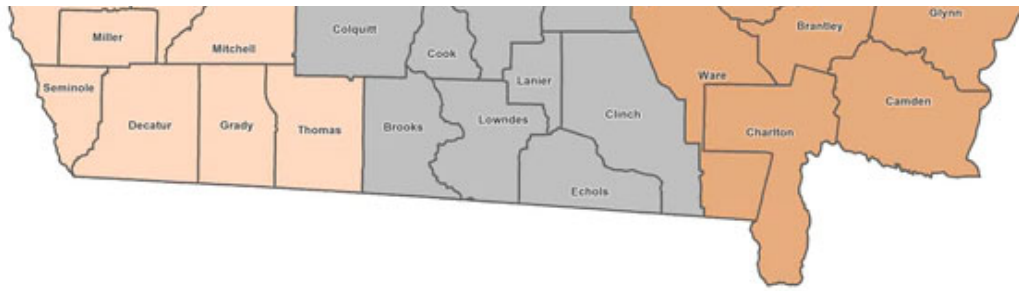
Some voters in Cobb County could also gain a new representative after next year’s elections — Republican U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene. The northwest Georgia district Greene represents would be reshaped to reach into a Democratic-leaning part of Cobb, in the Austell and Powder Springs areas. The district as a whole, however, would remain overwhelmingly Republican.

Two Republican legislators broke with their party and voted against the map: state Rep. Philip Singleton, a Republican from Sharpsburg who opposed changes that made parts of his Coweta County district more Democratic, and state Rep. Timothy Barr of Lawrenceville, who is running for Congress.

Proposed Joint Congressional Districts of Georgia

Client: 5018
Plan: Congress-prop1-2021
Type: Congress





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Credit: Special

About the Author



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Mark Niese covers voting rights and elections for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. He also reports on the Georgia House of Representatives and government. He has been a reporter at the AJC since 2013 following a decade at The Associated Press in Atlanta, Honolulu and Montgomery, Ala.

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