

AS THE SOUTH GROWS

PROPAGATING POWER

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CONTENTS

Propagating Power

01 Acknowledgements

02 About GSP

03 Executive Summary

05 Voices from the Field

06 Resourcing Southern Political Infrastructure

10 Strategies for Lasting Change

21 The Democracy We Choose

30 Guiding Practices

33 Stay Connected With GSP

34 Appendix

| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, GSP would like to thank the organizers and movement leaders who dedicate their lives to advancing justice and equity in the South. We are grateful for the ways you show up for community and lead with integrity.

As the South Grows relies on the lived and living experience of movement organizers working on the frontlines to support the visions of Southern communities. The stories in *Propagating Power* were written by exemplary leaders with decades of experience in shaping the Southern political organizing landscape. Their knowledge, guidance, and relationships have had innumerable impact on the daily lives of Southerners.

Thank you to our content writers, Erin Dale McClellan of The Partnership Fund, Tamioka Atkins of ProGeorgia, and Cliff Albright of Black Voters Matter for sharing your stories and expertise. Your wisdom and the work of organizations like yours continues to resource the region in untold ways.

Thank you to GSP's staff and partners for providing valuable guidance throughout the writing and research process. A special thanks to Amber Brown and Taylor Chapman for leading the project.

Thank you to those who came before us, those who are still fighting, and those who will carry the work after.

Image description: Attendees of GSP's Convening sit together for a discussion.





GRANTMAKERS
FOR SOUTHERN
PROGRESS

Image description: Attendees of GSP's Convening walk through willow trees in Alabama.

ABOUT GRANTMAKERS FOR SOUTHERN PROGRESS

Grantmakers for Southern Progress (GSP) is a membership-based network of funders and practitioners committed to advancing structural and cultural change in the Southern United States. GSP serves as a philanthropic solutions hub that builds relationships, aligns and leverages resources, and facilitates ongoing social justice education to support Black, Brown, Indigenous, and all directly impacted communities in the South.

We envision a region that is just and caring, where all people have the power to live whole and prosperous lives, free from fear and marginalization. Grantmakers For Southern Progress believes the South is uniquely qualified to achieve these transformative changes and lay an indelible foundation for lasting equity and justice in the country overall, for “As the South goes, so goes the Nation.”

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Southern political organizing is an entity all its own. While the South has historically been the most politically visionary region in the nation, extractive funding practices, voter suppression, persistent racism, and the misrepresentation of the South as a “lost cause” continues to hold Southerners in political limbo.

As our political landscape has continued to shift, philanthropy has yet to meet the moment effectively. Many social justice funders wisely adjusted their funding practices at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic by increasing investments and relaxing reporting requirements. However, just three years later, philanthropy has backtracked on many of these crisis-informed adjustments, leaving organizations reeling from the impact of the sector’s inconsistency. Funding for political organizing, especially led by Black and Brown organizations, is greatly lacking and in no way proportional to the work organizations are leading on the ground. Funds that are available often come too late in election cycles to have the desired impact, and organizers continue to tread water in feast or famine cycles of funding.

The diversity of the region combined with Southern community organizing strategy is reshaping regional and national politics as we know it. The 2020 presidential election broke records in voter turnout, nationally and in the South. States like Georgia saw several hard-won Democratic wins despite long term political strongholds by Republicans. At the same time, Republican backlash was fierce and swift. Lawmakers created barriers to progress through increased gerrymandering, voter suppression tactics, and policies that stripped away the legal power of democratic representation. Movement organizations responded through base-building, pushing for voter protections, lawsuits, and meeting community needs, all while facing a pandemic, election fatigue, and the electorate’s growing distrust in democracy.



Image description: A plant illustration growing out of soil.

Erin Dale McClellan | The Partnership Fund



We see this responsibility as an act of **propagation**, whereby we continue the cycle of growth for Southern movement infrastructure through **consistency, investment, and care.**

As we consider the continued growth of the South, our political power, and the legacy of resistance movements continuing to shape the region, we think about philanthropy's responsibility in the work. We believe we must recognize the wisdom and tactics of those who came before us, partner with movement organizers who show up for their communities year-round, and share strategies that will sustain Southern progress long-term. We see this responsibility as an act of *propagation*, whereby we continue the cycle of growth for Southern movement infrastructure through consistency, investment, and care. In *As the South Grows: Propagating Power*, Grantmakers for Southern Progress and our movement partners explain the complicated political conditions Southerners must navigate daily and offer solutions philanthropy must implement to ensure that Black, Brown, Indigenous and all directly impacted communities in the South are no longer left behind.

For those living and working in the region, this work is not new to us, and when properly resourced, Southerners have laid the roadmap for progress across the nation.

”

Image description: A group of people attend a strategy session led by The Partnership Fund. They are sitting in a circle in a conference room.



VOICES FROM THE FIELD

The Partnership Fund supports powerful organizations rooted in, and accountable to, multi-racial and multi-class bases within states. These organizations work towards independent political power and are building critical movement ecosystems for change. Visit ThePartnershipFund.net.

Black Voters Matter increases power in marginalized, predominantly Black communities. We believe that effective voting allows a community to determine its own destiny. We agree with the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. when he said, "Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love." Visit BlackVotersMatter.org.

ProGeorgia is a bold, trusted, and diverse collaborative that champions an equitable and inclusive democracy, for and with traditionally underrepresented communities. ProGeorgia supports and coordinates the civic engagement programs of our diverse partner organizations. ProGeorgia develops infrastructure, executes joint strategies, and employs new tools and technology to assure a government that is more responsive to the needs of our constituencies. Visit ProGeorgia.org.

Image description: Several organizers with Black Voters Matter gather together in front of the "Blackest Bus in America."



OUR PARTNERS



RESOURCING SOUTHERN POLITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

By Erin Dale McClellan
Executive Director, The Partnership Fund

THE SOUTH IS A ROADMAP

When we take a deeper dive into the demographic shifts in the South in recent years, it is clear why this vibrant region is critical to creating the conditions for justice and self-determination. More than half of the fastest growing cities in the country are in the South, and more than half of Black Americans (56%) live in the South. The South is home to the fastest-growing Latine and Asian American populations in the country. As the largest geographical area in the nation, and as more people migrate here, our political power is only going to increase. It is imperative that we build a multicultural representative democracy backed by people power. At the same time, if most of the people in the country are in the South, the majority of political investments made by philanthropy should come to the South as well.

Image description: Erin Dale McClellan sits in a rocking chair with her hands folded and resting in her lap.



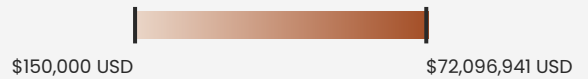
Strategic and creative investment in Southern organizations supporting independent and liberatory resource generation strategies have had incredible impact on our region, which is often misrepresented as a lost cause. Recent electoral wins in Georgia and Alabama, along with historical efforts from Reconstruction to the Civil Rights movement and beyond, show us that the South is hungry for change and willing to put in the work to make it happen. For those living and working in the region, this work is not new to us, and when properly resourced, Southerners have laid the roadmap for progress across the nation.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND LONG-TERM INVESTMENTS

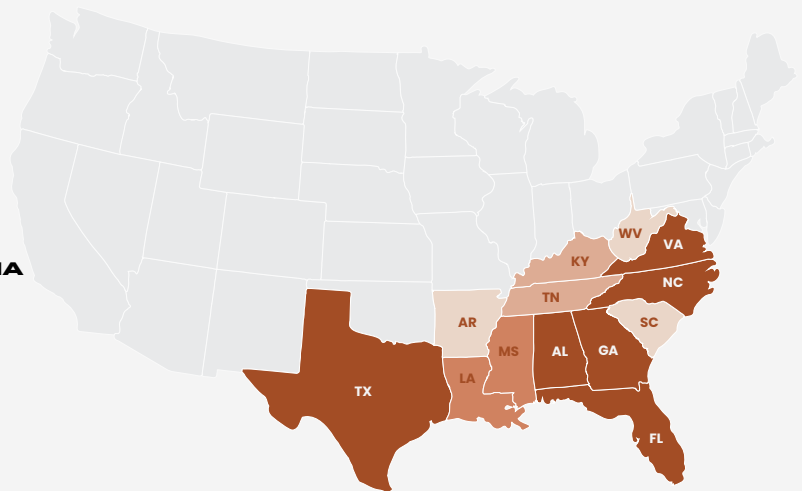
Across the country and in the South, civic engagement organizations face ongoing challenges with sustainable funding. Investments around organizing, voter engagement, and policy advocacy are paltry in the South, particularly for organizations led by people of color. Whether this limited funding is due to a legacy of white supremacy, the “Southern strategy,” or a lack of knowledge of transformative work in the South, we know what the underinvestment has meant for communities on the ground. Historically, funding in the South has focused on the larger states like Georgia, North Carolina, and Florida, while leaving states like Arkansas, Alabama, Tennessee, Mississippi and Kentucky with inadequate levels of investment.

DEMOCRACY FUNDING HEAT MAP

Concentration of Equitable Structural Change, Power Building, and Democracy funding invested in states from 2016- 2022



GEORGIA \$72,096,941	TENNESSEE \$9,713,445
TEXAS \$52,736,758	ALABAMA \$7,569,843
FLORIDA \$38,075,389	KENTUCKY \$3,926,953
NORTH CAROLINA \$34,868,066	WEST VIRGINIA \$1,118,450
VIRGINIA \$26,496,481	SOUTH CAROLINA \$552,869
LOUISIANA \$23,772,261	ARKANSAS \$551,831
MISSISSIPPI \$10,691,005	PUERTO RICO \$150,000



Source: Candid Non-Profit Data

Funding data suggests that the number of grants typically reserved for democratic and civic engagement projects has increased over the years, but often follows a cyclical pattern with sharply increased funding during election cycles and equally drastic cuts when elections are over. These cyclical funding practices around voter engagement work create many challenges. Namely, movement organizations are kept in a constant state of crisis, often needing to take precious time away from their programming to fundraise. However, there is an opportunity to change this pattern. **Funders can make a difference by continuously partnering with communities and organizers to build the power and capacity needed for deep structural and political change that will ripple across the country.**

MOVING TOWARD SUSTAINABILITY AND AWAY FROM TRADITIONAL PHILANTHROPY

Limited institutional investment in the South has forced organizations to figure out alternative income strategies to sustain their work, including small-scale grassroots fundraising and larger land-based development projects. Funders like The Amalgamated Foundation have led the effort in recent years to expand this sector of the work, focusing efforts to build an ecosystem of self-sustained power building organizations. These strategies allow power building and social justice organizations to develop entrepreneurial enterprises that generate income. Southern organizations, for-profit and not-for-profit, must cultivate sustainable funding models that allow us to thrive and plan for the long haul. 'Business-as-usual' philanthropic charity has proven ineffective for long-term sustainability, particularly in the South. As such, it is imperative that we help create the conditions for more sustainable funding networks and move away from overdependence on philanthropic support. However, philanthropy still has a significant role to play in the political ecosystem of the South.

HEADING SOUTH | FASTEST GROWING CITIES

10 Fastest-Growing Large Cities in the United States

Georgetown, TX	14.4%
Santa Cruz, CA	12.5%
Kyle, TX	10.9%
Leander, TX	10.9%
Little Elm, TX	8.0%
Westfield, IN	7.7%
Queen Creek, AZ	6.7%
North Port, FL	6.6%
Cape Coral, FL	6.4%
Port St. Lucie, FL	6.4%

Census Regions

South	■
West	■

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

When funding arrives early in electoral cycles – by April or sooner – organizations have plenty of time to develop and plan their programs, including hiring, training, and preparing staff. Proven power-building strategies involve multiple contacts with members of the community, and each step along the path to civic engagement requires specific preparation and tactics from these local experts.

To build robust engagement programs that keep folks connected year-round, and not just during election cycles, funding must be consistent, predictable, and sustained. This creates the conditions for the organizers and communities to create the forward-thinking, long-term strategies needed to lay the groundwork for progress focused on the next several decades, not just the next few months. For example, relationships with new voters developed during the election cycle can be lost if funding is not available to maintain them, wasting valuable time and money. Funding year-round engagement is critical to shifting conditions in the South, not only to build power, but to maintain it as well. As Amplify Fund observed in their 2023 4-Year Reflection report, “...funders are coming around to the understanding that funding in the South cannot just happen during election cycles, but must be a constant, multi-year investment” (p.24).

We still have a long way to go to ensure that these programs are fully funded year-round. Philanthropy is not alone. By working with and listening to movement organizations, funders can learn how to support the long-term power building that will transform the South and our nation.

Communities know the way. Philanthropy just needs to fund it.

Image description: A group of folks with The Partnership Fund pose for a group photo.



STRATEGIES FOR LASTING CHANGE

By Cliff Albright

Co-Founder, Black Voters Matter

BUILDING A REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

“The South is Rising” was the theme of the first Black Voters Matter (BVM) bus tour launched in 2018. We wanted to send a message: in contrast to the legacy of Jim Crow and white supremacy, a new South was rising, guided by the growing power of Black voters and directly impacted communities.

During that year, we saw two Black candidates in Georgia and Florida win gubernatorial primaries and come within razor thin margins of becoming the first Black governors in those states. Simultaneously, in a historic statewide referendum, Florida voters decided overwhelmingly to restore voting rights to formerly incarcerated community members. These developments were driven by large Black voter turnout due to the work of grassroots organizations and the developing political infrastructure.

Image description: Cliff Albright poses for the camera. He is wearing a brown suit jacket with a teal sweater underneath..



The following year in Louisiana, most pundits assumed the incumbent Democratic Governor would lose his reelection bid in the general election because the Republican candidates combined had surpassed 50% of votes. The assumption was that he could not gain votes because Black voters were not likely to turn out for the general election. However, a group of organizations led by Louisiana's Power Coalition managed to increase Black turnout, and he became the first Democratic Governor of Louisiana to win re-election to a second consecutive term in 44 years.

One year later, during the 2020 presidential election, Black voters impacted results in critical battleground states like Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin. No state shocked the country more than Georgia, however, where Black voter turnout so infuriated the failed incumbent president that he attempted to usurp democracy by seeking to change the election results, eventually leading to criminal charges.

Black voters and the grassroots organizations mobilizing them had the audacity to come back out two months later and do it again in the two Senate runoff elections, thereby securing the balance of power in the U.S. Senate.

Meanwhile, as much media attention has focused on federal and gubernatorial elections, Black communities and organizations have sought greater representation within state legislatures as well.

Although some viewed the 2023 election cycle as a so-called "off year," Virginia's state legislature secured democratic control in both chambers, garnering attention. Less discussed was the role that Black voters, organizations and candidates played in the Hampton Roads region, including cities such as Norfolk, Suffolk and Virginia Beach.



Image description: Cliff Albright holds a megaphone during a Black Voters Matter event.

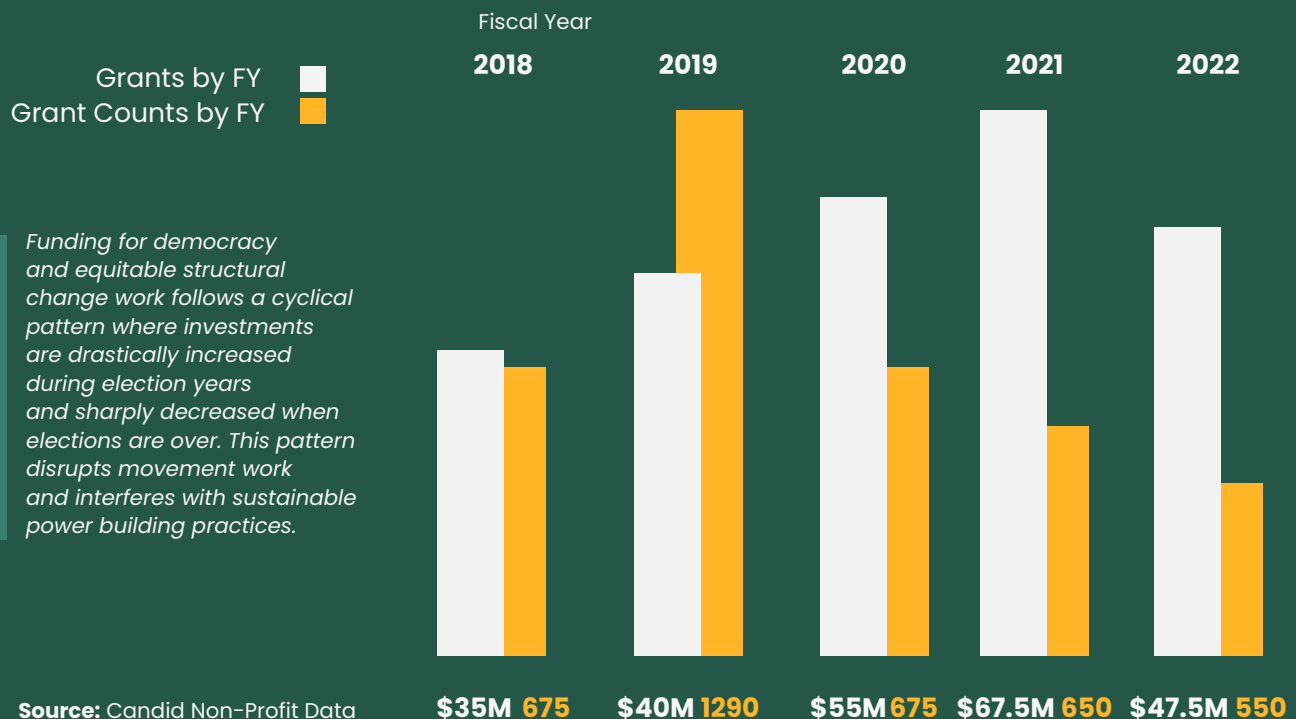
Propagating Power

Progress towards greater representation must always include, and arguably start at, the local level. In recent years, we've seen historic firsts in cities and counties across the South: first Black mayors, Latine mayors, women mayors, LGBTQ+ city council members, and the list goes on. These victories have taken place from as far west as San Antonio, Texas to as far east as Plymouth, North Carolina.

And finally, no discussion about our progress towards building a representative democracy in the South would be complete without mentioning recent legal victories directly related to forcing states to be more truly representative. The Supreme Court's decision in the *Allen v. Milligan* case, which was based on Alabama redistricting maps, has already led to additional Black opportunity³ districts. in Alabama and Louisiana, and will likely impact several other southern states as well.

Indeed, court victories are a function of political infrastructure. However, successful litigation requires at least two things. First, an effective legal team, and second, compelling plaintiffs. Regarding the first, organizations such as Legal Defense Fund, Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law and Advancement Project continue to strengthen their place in southern infrastructure and their connection to the organizing ecosystem. In addition, successful voting rights litigation requires plaintiffs usually in the form of organizations with enough body of work and data on which to make the case. Even when individual plaintiffs or individual voters serve as plaintiffs, those individuals are usually identified via their work and relationships with the local organizations. Such has been the case in Alabama, Louisiana, Georgia, Florida, and South Carolina.

DEMOCRACY FUNDING PATTERNS





Cliff Albright | Black Voters Matter

State violence is not limited to our power building efforts at the polling place. It **extends to our ability to safely canvass in communities** and concerns over safety at events.



Image description: A group of protesters hold signs that say “Black Voters Matter” and march together.

| BARRIERS TO THE WORK

Despite the many victories we have seen in the South, several challenges continue to slow the pace of progress, and at times, even push us backward. These obstacles include voter suppression, preemption, threats of violence, and funding limitations.

| VOTER SUPPRESSION

The most obvious and direct response to the growing political power of marginalized groups in the South has been the wave of voter suppression laws. An increase in laws restricting the freedom to vote began in 2013 after the Supreme Court’s Shelby decision weakened the Voting Rights Act and became even more pronounced after the 2020 presidential election and the weaponization of Trump’s “big lie.”

Although attempts to restrict voting have taken place in literally every state since the 2020 election, the harshest laws enacted have been in Southern states, with Florida, Texas and Georgia leading the Jim Crow 2.0 version of disenfranchisement. Despite decreased media attention on the suppression attacks after the 2021 wave, there have been ongoing attacks on voting rights every year since. At the time of writing this report, Alabama has made it illegal to return a person's ballot application on their behalf and has made it a felony to pay someone to distribute or collect⁴ applications. In doing so, the state has defined absentee voting assistance to be a crime on par with manslaughter.

A significant amount of data shows that these voter suppression laws are having the exact impact that their proponents are hoping for—making it more difficult for marginalized communities to vote. A recent report by the Brennan Center has found that the racial disparities in voter turnout have increased from 2008⁵ - 2022.

PREEMPTION

As our communities have increased power and representation across the South, agents of white supremacy continue to restrict the impact of that representation. In short, when the opposition is unable to keep us from electing candidates of our choice, their next option is to prevent our elected officials from honoring our political demands. Their preferred tool has become preemption, or passing laws at the state level to prevent cities or counties from implementing policies that would yield racial justice.

Early examples include restrictions on living wage laws pursued by cities like Birmingham and battles over masking policies in Atlanta during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. As some cities have tried to legalize marijuana or implement bail reform, states like Tennessee have blocked these efforts. Preemption has also included removing or restricting certain powers that elected officials have previously had. In more extreme instances, elected officials have been suspended or removed. Examples include the 2023 suspension of State Attorney Monique Worrell in central Florida and the Tennessee House removing Justin Pearson and Justin Jones from the legislature, thereby denying Nashville and Memphis representation by their chosen elected officials.

***Image description:** Cliff Albright waves to cars as they pass by the Black Voters Matter bus. His back is facing the camera and his shirt says "IT'S ABOUT US."*



More recently, the basic concept of preemption was extended to change the political boundaries of jurisdictions to restrict power from Black and Brown communities. For example, Mississippi’s attempt to create a separate judicial circuit and law enforcement district would completely bypass Jackson and further restrict Black citizens’ ability to determine who represents and polices their communities.

SECURITY

The South has a growing need for greater cyber and physical security. In several states, laws have made it easier for third parties to observe and/or harass voters as we cast our ballots. However, this intimidation is not limited to private individuals. Many states have increased tactics used by law enforcement to interact with and intimidate voters. For example, several formerly incarcerated community members in Florida were wrongfully arrested for voting, in an attempt to intimidate potential voters and scare them out of casting their ballots. Likewise, the enforcement of policies which ban the dispersal of food and water by volunteers at polling places have effectively created “election police,” and put further strain on voters who are often forced to wait hours before casting their ballots.

State violence is not limited to our power building efforts at the polling place. It extends to our ability to safely canvass in communities and concerns over safety at events. Recently, Black Voters Matter received a request for security support for a Florida organization which was being targeted by a white supremacist hate group. Among other things, they were concerned about threats against their meeting location, echoing back to the bombings of Black churches during the Civil Rights Movement.

Image description: Organizers with Working Families Party hold a rally in Georgia.



On this issue, we have started to see a growing number of funders asking about security concerns and most importantly, funding such needs. Grantmakers for Southern Progress, Funders for Justice, and others have played critical roles in helping to expand these conversations and funding practices. However, there is more work to be done to normalize security as a budget expense the same way other line items are expected, or even required, in proposals.

| FUNDING

Finally, a major barrier we continue to face in the South is the limited funding support, particularly funding allocated towards building political power. Like other regions of the country, organizations in the South saw a temporary increase in funding following the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, which led to sustained protests and “racial reckoning” in the summer of 2020. However, those funds have dried up over the past two years and Southern grassroots groups are now facing a perfect storm of conditions negatively impacting fundraising efforts.

First, as the country moves further away—both chronologically and ideologically—from the events of 2020, the financial commitment to racial justice organizing has decreased. This shift has been worsened by the recent attacks on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), which has left some grantmakers hesitant to fund initiatives directly related to racial justice or support organizations that are led by, or even serving, Black and Brown communities. Lastly, there have been concerns raised around the overall investment environment in the U.S., which is leading some funders to make fewer grants. **When such contractions happen, the lowest priority in the pecking order feels the impact first, which means racial justice organizing in the South usually takes the hit.**

Image description: “End Racism Now” is painted in big yellow letters on a street in downtown Raleigh, North Carolina.



The funding landscape is not only shaped by dollar amounts, but grantmaking practices as well. There have been positive changes in recent years, including increased general operating support, reduced reporting requirements, and particularly important for political power building, a recognition that funds must be moved earlier in the year for community groups to be most effective. The recent collaborative efforts to move funds for electoral organizing by April is a welcome development that hopefully will be normalized. However, there is still much ground to cover.

Image description: Organizers with the Workers Defense Project protest for increased worker protections in Texas during the COVID-19 pandemic.



RELATIONSHIPS ARE INFRASTRUCTURE

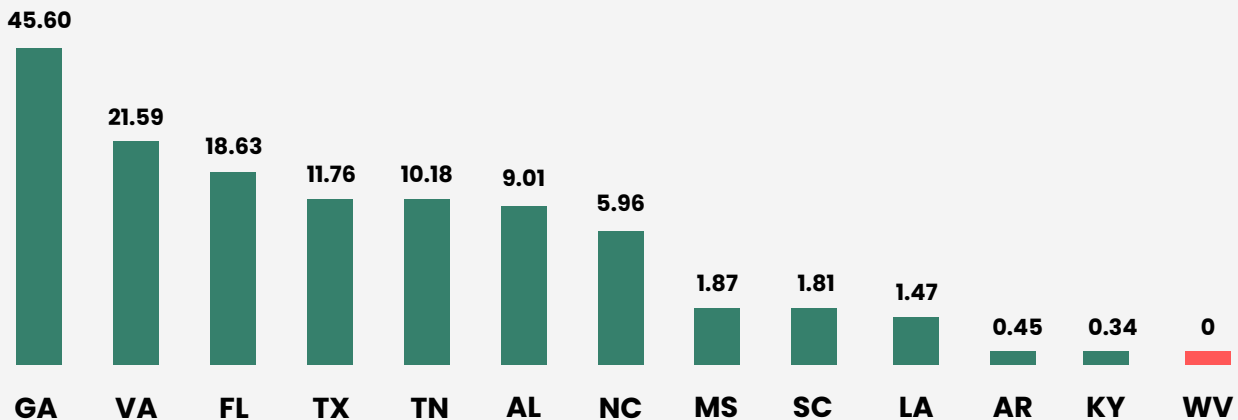
There are several strategies Southern organizations have successfully utilized for power building that will help us overcome the obstacles discussed above. This includes tapping into the power of cultural organizing, increasing use of new outreach tools and technologies, investing in self-care to make our movement more sustainable, and much more. However, the most important strategy and the glue that holds all our strategies together, is the intentional development of relationships. Indeed, **relationships are infrastructure.**

At Black Voters Matter, we believe that everyone we engage is an organizer, and every relationship they have is part of our organizing universe. However, we don't stop at organizing individuals. Instead, we prioritize the important and difficult work of encouraging organizations to build relationships with each other. This has been a critical component of every victory we have seen in recent years.

VOTER ENGAGEMENT STATE DIRECTED FUNDING

Percentage of state directed funding explicitly allocated for voter engagement activities between 2016–2022

Source: Candid Non-Profit Data



Organizational relationship building takes place in a variety of contexts, including that of state civic engagement tables, of which some of the strongest in the country can be found in Georgia, North Carolina, Florida and Louisiana. Other strong collaborations have been built via specific organizing campaigns, including around police violence, housing and economic justice efforts, abortion rights, and much more.



Image description: A large group of organizers with Black Voters Matter raise their fists and smile on the steps of a government building.

Recognizing that relationships are infrastructure also means recognizing that **changing Southern states will not happen through singular cities alone.** It takes movements of organizations in cities, towns, and counties across a state to make a difference. While Atlanta and Fulton County received the bulk of Republican ire in 2020, the Black voter turnout that helped decide the presidential and senate races were not possible without an entire ecosystem of mid-sized cities like Macon and Augusta and rural counties that make up the state of Georgia. Similarly, when Black voters impacted the 2019 gubernatorial election in Louisiana, the victory was not decided by New Orleans alone. It took a combined effort from New Orleans up to Shreveport, and from Monroe down to Lake Charles.

Changing Mississippi is not just about Jackson.

Changing Alabama is not just about Birmingham.

Changing North Carolina is not just about Charlotte or Raleigh.

The same applies to every Southern state and the coalitions of unsung heroes and movement organizations who have sustained the progressive infrastructure in each of them for years. We are our most effective, not when funders require “networks,” but when ecosystems are the result of organic relationship building and proper investment in movement objectives. **As funders increase and maintain investments in our overall organizing efforts and the strengthened capacity that it yields, benefits to our political infrastructure and the power to control our lives will be immeasurable.**

Image description: Cliff Albright passes a Black Voters Matter shirt through the organization’s bus window to a person standing outside.





Image description: Tamiaka Atkins, Executive Director of ProGeorgia, smiles at her desk. Behind her are posters with images of voters that say "I COUNT!"

THE DEMOCRACY WE CHOOSE

By Tamiaka Atkins
Executive Director, ProGeorgia

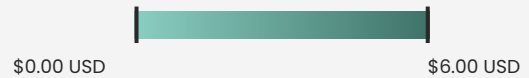
SOUTHERN POLITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE THEN AND NOW

Democracy work in Georgia, and across the South, has transformed since 2016. More and more nonprofits are closing the gap between voter registration, legislative advocacy, and Get Out the Vote (GOTV) work, while providing leadership development training, holding elected officials accountable, and lobbying at the grassroots to advance community interests.

At its root, movement work creates a more equitable and just society through electoral action and people-centered policies. Movement work is not singular because organizers come into this work from different places and spaces, with different hopes and dreams. However, we know that achieving sustained progress in the South includes reproductive, environmental, and restorative justice, access to quality healthcare and education, and more. **One thing is for sure, the vision we are building for ourselves is reflective of our vision for the country.** What happens in Georgia impacts the rest of the South and the nation as a whole.

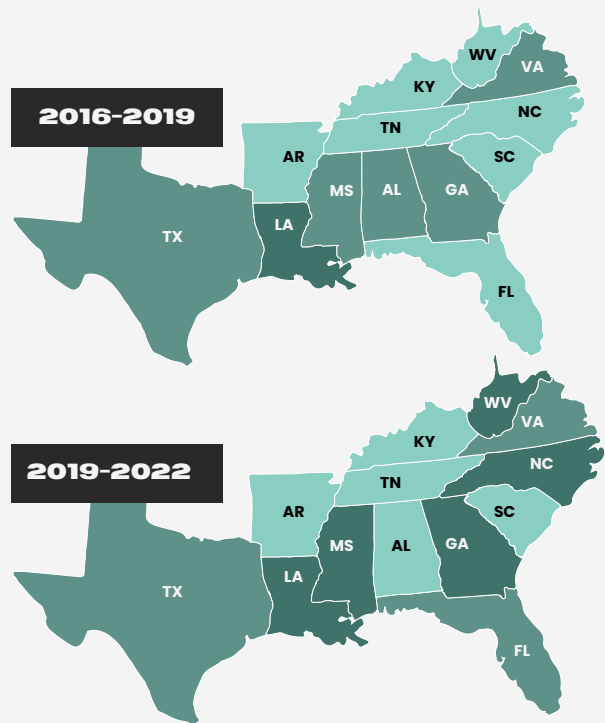
GRANT ALLOCATIONS BY POPULUS

Democracy related grants allocated on a per person basis.



Source: Candid Non-Profit Data

\$ by Pop 2016-2019	\$ by Pop 2019-2022	
\$1.04	\$0.69	Alabama
\$0.15	\$0.09	Arkansas
\$0.73	\$1.17	Florida
\$1.35	\$5.89	Georgia
\$0.49	\$0.57	Kentucky
\$2.48	\$3.53	Louisiana
\$1.38	\$2.83	Mississippi
\$0.92	\$2.98	North Carolina
\$0.05	\$0.08	South Carolina
\$0.78	\$0.96	Tennessee
\$01.07	\$1.13	Texas
\$1.36	\$2.31	Virginia
\$0.16	\$0.49	West Virginia



Historically in Georgia, like many states across the South, homegrown political infrastructure already existed, though it was underfunded and under recognized because it looked different when compared to other regions. For example, Dorothy Bolden, who founded the National Domestic Workers Union in Atlanta (the predecessor of the National Domestic Workers Alliance), organized Black domestic workers to help achieve significant civil rights gains. Although she was consulted by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter on workers' rights, her efforts, strategy, and brilliance has largely gone unrecognized. Bolden built infrastructure by creating economic support systems within her organization, helping make sure people could pay their bills and put food on the table. As she advocated for better wages and respect for workers, she required all members of the National Domestic Workers Union to be registered to vote, because she recognized the privilege and responsibility voting carried.

Propagating Power

This is what infrastructure building looks like in the South: working in and with the community to advance our shared interests. Southern infrastructure is built from a grassroots, not a top down, approach. Like Bolden, Georgian Terry Gilmore fundraised for and helped feed participants in the Montgomery bus boycott movement. These women, and many like them, represent the tradition of infrastructure building that has traditionally existed across the South – organizers whose names are often lost to history, but without whom gains for civic, civil, and human rights would not have been possible. Even today, many Black women in Georgia and beyond are playing similar roles, sometimes on a larger scale – strategizing, convening and coordinating people, and finding resources to push movements forward by centering community and collaboration.



Image description: Organizers with Georgia Muslim Voters Project smile for the camera while tabling at a voter registration event. They are holding stickers that say "My Muslim Vote" and "Georgia Muslim Voters Project."

In 2012, leaders from thirteen Georgia nonprofits founded ProGeorgia to provide funding, training, and critical resources to advance democracy across the state. Groups doing voter registration and Get Out the Vote (GOTV) work were woefully under-resourced and underfunded at the time. The desire for people-centered policies and elected leadership to champion them meant that organizers needed more consistent support and help coordinating their joint efforts. Since then, ProGeorgia has emerged as the leading civic infrastructure organization in Georgia, engaging more than 3.2 million people in the state year-round, multiple times per year. Our \$16 million budget supports the programs and advocacy of our 61 table partners. In the nearly twelve years since ProGeorgia's founding, **Georgia has become a political bellwether for what is possible across the South if organizations are sustainably well-resourced and funded.**

For decades, Southern organizers did not receive the kind of support they needed. The lack of sustained civic infrastructure led to a climate in which policies, and the policymakers implementing them, ignored the needs of everyday people. In 2018, the tides began to change. A surge of interest and funding in the years that followed, culminating with the 2022 midterms, revealed just how powerful people-centered movements can be. **The lesson in Georgia, and across the South, is that progress happens when you put the most directly impacted people at the center of developing strategy, spearheading campaigns, and leading decision-making.**

CRITICAL WINS SINCE 2018

The 2018 statewide gubernatorial race was a turning point for Georgia. The historic nomination of Stacey Abrams, the first Black woman to be nominated for Governor, along with an increase in voter suppression by Republican leadership at the time, brought Georgia to the forefront of states to watch. In most cases, democracy isn't something that average people pay attention to. Georgians, however, have consistently shown up year after year, despite the pandemic and election fatigue. Roughly 97% of Georgia residents are registered to vote and we have some of the highest voter turnout in the country. That level of turnout is only possible when organizers can make meaningful, non-transactional connections with people and educate voters about their role in creating a more just and free society.

***Image description:** Organizers with People's Advocacy Institute smile during a community event.*



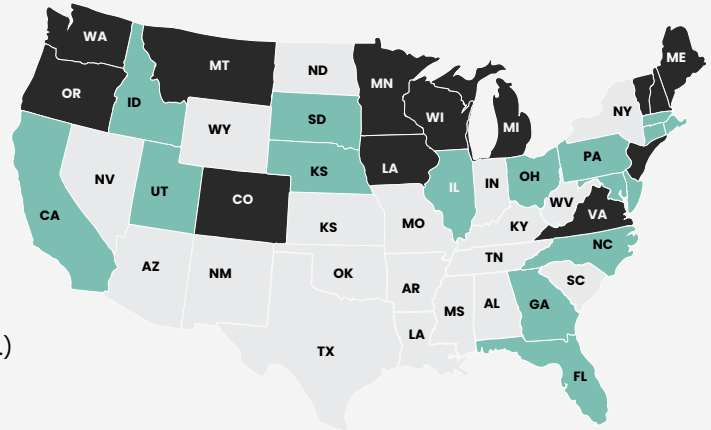
VOTER TURNOUT PERCENTAGES

Voter turnout percentages per state in 2020

Source: Movement Advancement Project

Voter percentage heat map legend

- Voter turnout in 2020 above 73% (13 states)
- Voter turnout in 2020 66%-73% (16 states)
- Voter turnout in 2020 below 66% (21 states + D.C.)



Even as voter interest and engagement soars, we have seen a lot of retrenchment as well. An astounding number of the legislative victories won since 2018 have been rolled back. Our voting landscape has shifted since the dramatic turnout in 2020 and we now contend with legislation that restricts voter contact on election days, closures in polling places, and reductions in voting by mail and ballot drop boxes, as well as ongoing efforts to defund and dismantle fair and balanced election boards. In this ebb and flow, the consistent victory is that we keep pushing forward, our partners remain committed to this work, and leaders are positioned to continue battling challenges to full democratic participation by all Georgia residents.

REDEFINING POLITICAL ORGANIZING TO BUILD REAL POWER

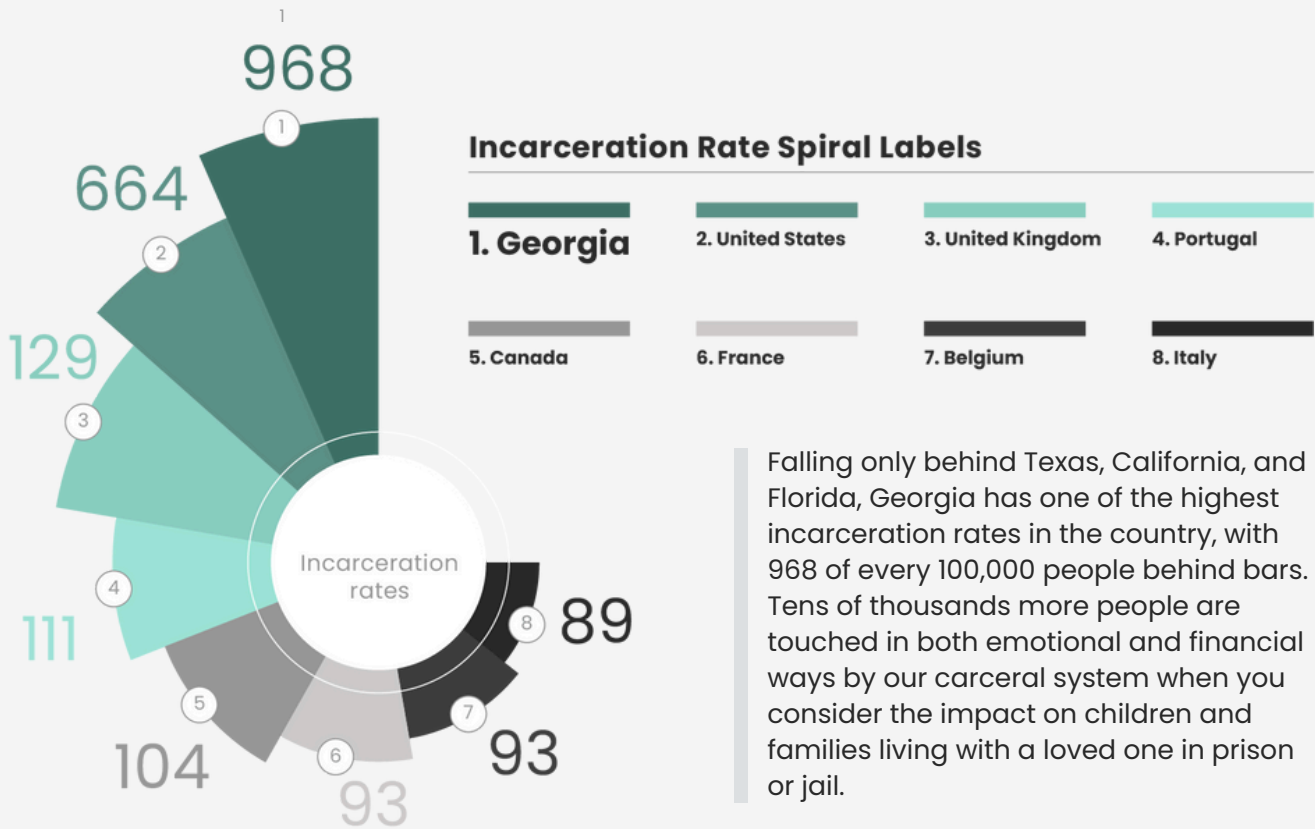
Community organizers are integral to protecting, upholding, and strengthening our democracy. The bulk of their work extends beyond immediate policy wins and registering people to vote. Organizers take care of community first, and through those connections, civic engagement becomes possible.

During the pandemic, one of ProGeorgia’s partners, Women Watch Africa, dropped off baskets of food at people’s doors which included voter outreach materials as well. **This kind of service-to-organizing model has lasting and immeasurable impact, but it is often the work that gets ignored.** Around this time, Census work was being heavily invested in by funders, and organizations like ProGeorgia were being pressured to guarantee turnout for the Census on grant applications. While movement organizations can track the number of people engaged, neighborhoods canvassed, and families spoken to, turnout is never guaranteed. Asking movement organizations to promise a certain amount of turnout, in the middle of the pandemic, created unrealistic goals with impractical metrics attached.

Moreover, the databases, systems, and tools used for collecting Census data are only able to track born and naturalized U.S. citizens. Using citizenship status as the sole factor in determining who should be engaged and involved in conversations around civic engagement is harmful to our communities. Only counting or recognizing documented people means that resources like education, healthcare, housing, and other public services cannot reflect the actual need of the people. In mixed-status families, only one member of the family can vote, while the rest of the family cannot. This does not mean, however, that the family does not matter to conversations about elected officials, issues that matter, and what every level of government is supposed to be doing for us. Many of ProGeorgia’s partners organize in mixed-status communities and are leading efforts to encourage civic participation in communities, regardless of people’s ability to vote, which has a deep and lasting impact. This work also deserves to be recognized and supported. **Every voice in our communities deserves to be represented and heard.**

COMPARING GEORGIA AND NATO COUNTRIES

Incarceration rates per 100,000 population



Source: PrisonPolicy.org



Image description: A view of barbed wire attached to a prison wall with a blue sky in the background.

More than two-thirds of the people that are incarcerated did not commit violent crimes against other people, and many are locked up on drug charges. These folks' civil liberties and economic prospects are often limited because of their contact with the penal system, which is not designed to be rehabilitative or restorative. At the same time, our state is becoming more militarized. The \$67 million construction of Cop City has become a hotbed issue across the state. Tactics being used against protestors, including pepper spraying, imprisonment, house raids, and other forms of targeting, are reminiscent of the slave patrols that preceded our current system of policing and foreshadow our worst fears of a military-police state.

These issues remind us of what is at stake, now and in the future. Our movement creates space for all people to benefit, not just a privileged few.

We understand that democracy reform, civic engagement, and voting are tools and processes by which to achieve our desired ends. However, voting by itself is not and cannot be the goal. Voting will not save us. Voting is simply one tactic we can use, and a tool for people to feel their inherent power and exercise in their best interest.

For our movement, voting is a power building tool, but it is not the "win" itself. Casting a ballot does not change individuals' lives – it does not put food on the table, provide adequate housing, quality education, or affordable childcare. Voting is the key that opens the door for year-round participation from our shared communities, and it provides a level of accountability from elected officials to the people that they serve.

MOVEMENT'S AGENDA

Although democracy has been a kitchen table conversation for Georgians since 2016, we have yet to see progress in areas we need it most. Georgia has an affordable housing crisis, one of the largest economic gaps and income disparities across the country, and we are in the bottom five in the nation when it comes to education and healthcare. We have also lost our right to bodily autonomy as the State has taken away our right to abortion. Voting in and of itself without organizing is not the answer, though it helps to smooth the path forward.

Our movement has momentum, but we need help sustaining it. Funders get excited about possibilities in the South when big elections approach, but that excitement is often accompanied by unrealistic and unwinnable metrics. As a result, interest in funding fluctuates depending on election years. These transactional approaches, which only measure success with metrics like the number of people you registered or turned out to vote, ignore and undermine the bulk of organizers' work. These metrics fail to capture the actual number of conversations and interactions had, numbers of families and community members engaged, or the steps being taken daily to build and sustain relationships over time. It is said that change happens at the speed of trust. A better set of metrics, then, are ones that reflect things like the number of people who attended a leadership development opportunity or to whom direct service was provided.

Image description: Organizers with People's Advocacy Institute point gleefully at the camera while wearing masks at a community clean-up event.



Movement work helps us achieve freedom to live as we choose. When I look at my daughters, I want them to have the freedom to decide what is right for them. I want them to have equitable access to all things, free from racism, sexism, and any other form of oppression that holds people back and makes our lives harder. Southern organizers are working towards a truly accessible democracy, one in which it is possible to elect real representation that listens to the needs of people and crafts policies responsive to them. **My wish for my daughters is my wish for all people and, in many ways, I believe it is the work of our movement: molding a democracy of the people, by the people, and for the people.**

Image description: Tamiaka Atkins sits with her two daughters on each side of her, smiling at the camera. Each of them are posing with their hands under their chins.





Image description: Attendees at GSP's Convening stand and look toward the stage during a plenary session.

GUIDING PRACTICES

Being accountable to the South requires that we acknowledge the role philanthropy plays in shaping our justice infrastructure.

To be in relationship with one another, we must support the efforts of movement leaders and organizations who are fighting for progress across the South. *As the South Grows* has made the case for philanthropy's role in supporting the Southern political landscape by asking that funders make deep, transformative investments in the South that reflect the power and possibility of the region. We have provided a list of guiding practices to help align your grantmaking with Southern strategy and movement work.

Organize with your colleagues and peers to:

PROVIDE CONTINUOUS FUNDING YEAR-ROUND, NOT JUST DURING ELECTION YEARS.

All too often, opportunities for funding resources are only available in the year prior to and during an election. However, Southern movement organizations are working to redefine democracy and create a representative South beyond electoral cycles. Building a base of folks committed to seeing the South thrive will not happen every two or four years. It is an ongoing organizing commitment. Movement has remained consistent in this work for generations and our funding must follow.

INCREASE FUNDING FOR BASE BUILDING, NOT JUST CIVIC ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES.

Our movement leaders are struggling to find funders committed to resourcing base building activities. Creating a leadership pipeline takes time and deep relationship building and cannot always be measured with the same metrics used for typical voter engagement. Base building requires organizing community days, feeding families, supporting and amplifying youth voices, going door to door and many other activities that help support the narrative of a unified, liberated South. Base building is a necessary part of movement organizations' success and sustainability efforts. However, getting folks out to vote in and of itself is only a tool towards progress.

LISTEN TO MOVEMENT, NOT JUST THE MEDIA.

Media narratives often set our expectations for what can and will happen across the political landscape of the South. However, media does not and cannot represent the entire Southern experience. Developing honest and transformative relationships with movement leaders who are implementing strategies to build policy change is the best way to strengthen investments in the current political landscape. Proximate, knowledgeable, trustworthy, and dedicated leaders exist in the South, and they are learning to be their own journalists.

INVEST IN SOUTHERN COMMUNITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE BUILDING, NOT JUST BALLOT MEASURES.

National and regional policy agendas are foretold long before they become voting matters. Movement leaders and Southern communities see the impacts of political shifts before they become national news. Social justice philanthropy must be as invested in strengthening political infrastructure by supporting community needs like ballot initiative access as much as protecting and preserving human rights. With clear and timely investments, philanthropy can work ahead of the vote when we invest in the communities and infrastructure of the Southern movement ecosystem through multi-year, general operating funds.

Image description: Participants at a community event hosted by People's Advocacy Institute gather in a circle for an activity.



STAY CONNECTED WITH GSP

Are you ready to invest in Southern grassroots movement work? Do you want to learn more about building equitable movement infrastructure in the South? We have what you need to get started.

To check out our previous reports and get the latest updates about *As the South Grows*, visit g4sp.org/AsTheSouthGrows

Image description: Participants at GSP's Convening discuss grantmaking practices during a strategy session.



FEEDBACK & QUESTIONS

Thank you for reading the *As the South Grows* report series. As we continue developing additional reports, we would love your feedback to ensure we are sharing content that aligns with your learning needs and experiences working in South. Scan the QR code above to be redirected to our microsite.

 info@g4sp.org

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Data Visuals

Data used throughout this report was sourced from Candid and filtered through Equitable Structural Change and Power Building categories between 2016–2022. This data does not represent all grants invested in the South nor is it comparative to national dollars.

Grant data separated by fiscal years is based on Candid’s FY measurements. For example, grantmaking for “FY 2020” typically includes grants made as early as February 2019 (for grantmakers with a fiscal year from February 2019 to January 2020) through those made December 2020 (for grantmakers with a fiscal year from January to December 2020).

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Photography

Photos provided by People’s Advocacy Institute, Workers Defense Fund, ProGeorgia, The Partnership Fund, Black Voters Matter, Georgia Muslim Voter Project, Working Families Party, and Grantmakers for Southern Progress.

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