

1-1-2019

Book Review - Politics in Georgia

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Recommended Citation

Barefield, J. (2019). Book Review - Politics in Georgia. *Georgia Library Quarterly*, 56(1). Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/glq/vol56/iss1/16>

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Off the SHELF

Politics in Georgia, 3rd edition by Robert M. Howard, Arnold Fleischmann, and Richard N. Engstrom (University of Georgia Press, 2017: ISBN 9780820352893, \$34.95)

Politics in Georgia is a well-organized volume that explores a history of Georgia politics, shifting demographics, voting trends in the state, Georgia's governance relative to other states and the federal government, the detailed functions of Georgia's branches of government, and the state's contemporary political concerns. The third edition provides an update to the 2007 second edition, which previously described the state of Georgia as politically purple; now, the authors of the third edition describe Georgia as "at least at the state level, a red state dominated by Republicans." This shift, the authors explain, is due to conservative constituents and politicians such as Governors Sonny Perdue (2003–2011) and Nathan Deal (2011–2019) switching from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party.

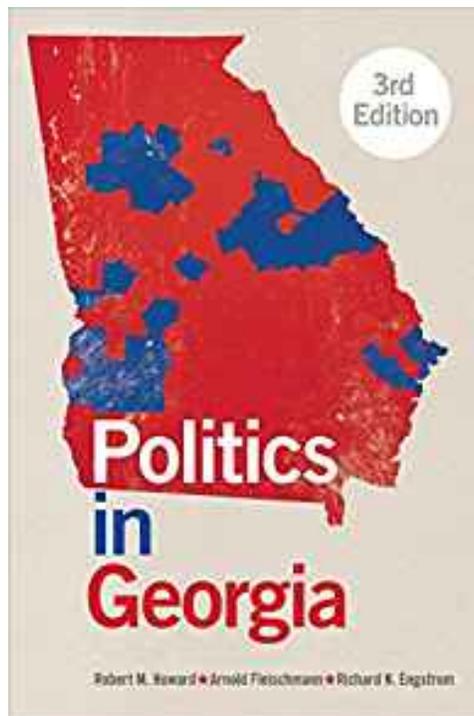
The authors perform exceptionally when tracing historical antecedents and demonstrating their continued impact on state politics today. For example, they explain that business and economic interests have long moderated Georgia politics, relative to other southern states. That economic prosperity, however, has "a long history of uneven development...which is typified by rural poverty and tensions between North and South Georgia." Related to

economic inequality, the authors also necessarily sketch a history of racial segregation and oppression in the state, noting how political factions like the Bourbon Democrats relied on coded language appealing to "the southern way of life, a phrase that came to stand for states' rights and racial segregation." The authors note, however, that while race certainly remains a factor in Georgia politics, race-based politics

have become increasingly less tenable as Georgia has further integrated itself into a globalized economy and experienced growth in immigration and urbanization.

The text is at its best when contextualizing Georgia politics and explaining the broad, practical impacts of Georgia politics on the lived experience of the people in the state. For example, the authors indicate that the Georgia legislature, the Georgia General Assembly, "is notable for its involvement in local matters and limited grant of authority to local governments." This state-

level control of local matters has manifested in statewide ballot initiatives affecting only specific localities and in the General Assembly's 2015 attempt at legislation preventing local governments from banning retailers' use of plastic bags. The authors' discussion reveals that while Georgia prizes state control of governance over federal control, lawmakers in Georgia do not extend this same logic to governance of municipalities within state borders, preferring instead the larger state-level governance.



While the writing style normally reflects the authors' ardor for the subject matter, at times the chapters on the legislature, executive branch, and legal system feel more obligatory than impassioned. Although these chapters are quite informative, they will most appeal to readers interested in the fine details of governmental practice.

In the final chapter, the authors pivot from an informative purpose to one of critique. They indicate, for example, that poor transportation in Atlanta is caused by a lack of clear authority and responsibility between organizations and agencies, and they describe the "so-called

water wars between Alabama, Georgia, and Florida [as] nonproductive and slow efforts by all three states to control pollution." Their critiques are sharp and illuminating.

Recommended for academic libraries, especially those with Southern history and political collections, although the work could also be of interest to the lay reader who would like to learn more about the history, contemporary situation, and inner workings of Georgia politics.

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