

# Mapping Homes of Georgia's Governors and Their Westward Shift (1776–2024)

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## Abstract

Since the start of the American Revolution, seventy-seven men have served as Governor of Georgia. Over time, the state expanded westward from the coast to become the largest state east of the Mississippi River. Although individual governors have been studied extensively (particularly James F. Cook's *The Governors of Georgia*), their residences remain underexplored as indicators of electoral power shifts. Based on the information of seventy-seven governors collected from Cook, the *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, and *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, this research visualizes the residences of governors at the time of their election by using ArcGIS and reveals the state's electoral power over almost 250 years of Georgia's history. They are divided into five distinct periods using key dates in the state's political history: 1776, the start of the American Revolution; 1825, the first gubernatorial election held by popular vote; 1865, the end of the Civil War; 1917, the start of Georgia's county unit system; and 1962, the last election held under the county unit system. While early governors primarily resided along the coast, those elected after 1962 predominantly hail from North Georgia. The county unit system, active from 1917 to 1962, visibly shaped electoral outcomes, heavily favoring rural counties. Notably, no governor from an urban county was elected under the county unit system. Mapping Georgia's governors illustrates the state's westward growth and the shift in its electoral base from the coast to Middle and North Georgia, along with the important effects of the county unit system.

## Introduction

Seventy-seven men have held the office of Governor of Georgia since 1776. Although individual governors have been studied extensively, particularly in Cook (2005) their residences remain underexplored as indicators of electoral power shifts. Governors have not always been elected by strict popular vote as they are today. From 1917 to 1962, the County Unit System, a method similar to the Electoral College, was used to select candidates in the primaries. The County Unit System gave much greater electoral power to rural voters, as noted by Saye (1950), Hughes (1951), and Cornelius (1961).

For this project, Georgia's governors have been divided into five distinct eras based on major events in the state's political history. These maps seek to illustrate the changing power of regions of Georgia, particularly under the county unit system.

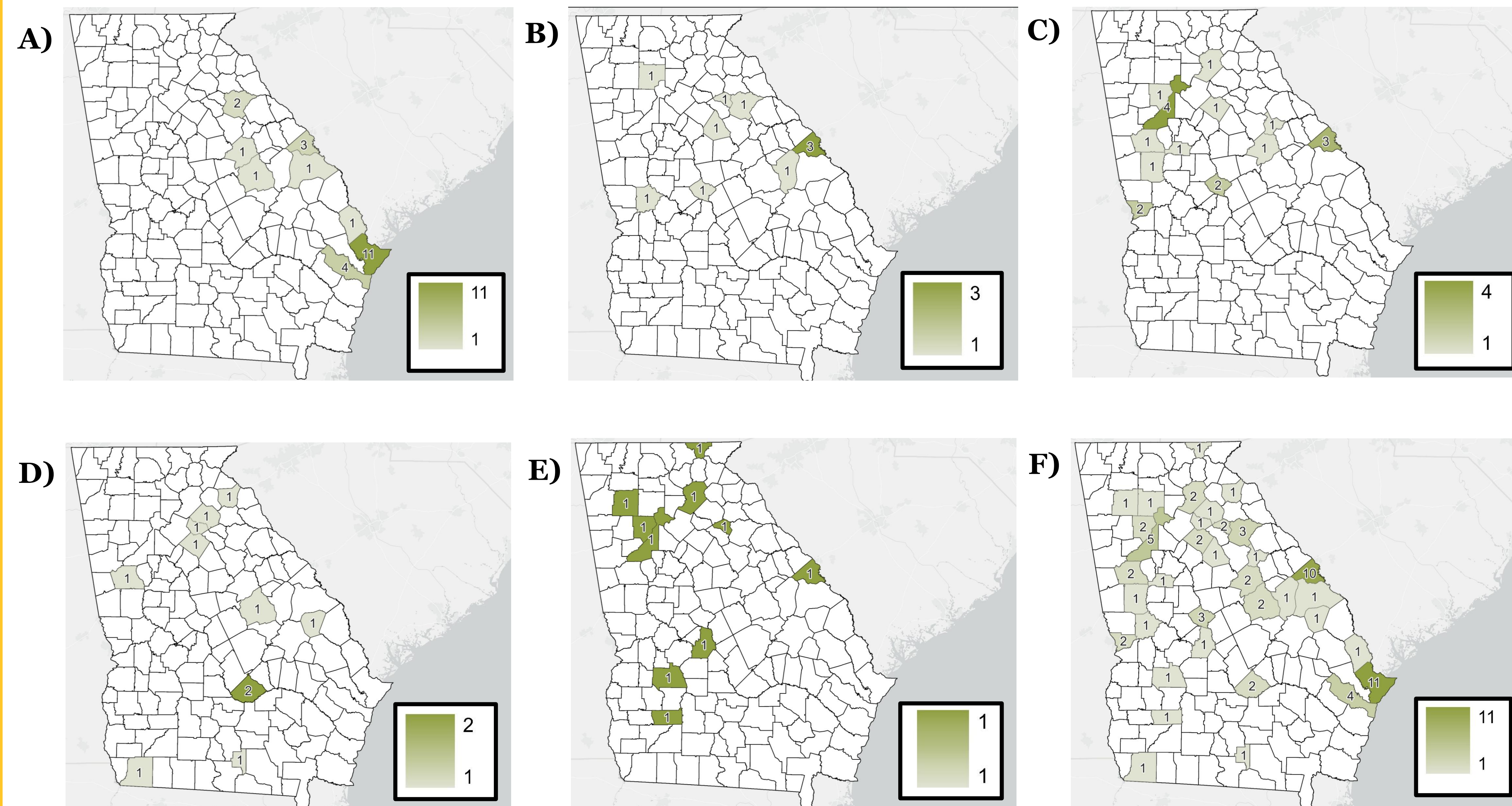
## Results

These maps demonstrate how, as the state grew westward, the homes of governors also shifted. Most governors from 1776 to 1825 lived near the coast, as seen in Fig. 1F. This matches the state's 1800 population in Fig. 2A. As Figs. 1B-1E illustrate, no governor has been elected from Coastal Georgia since the 1820s.

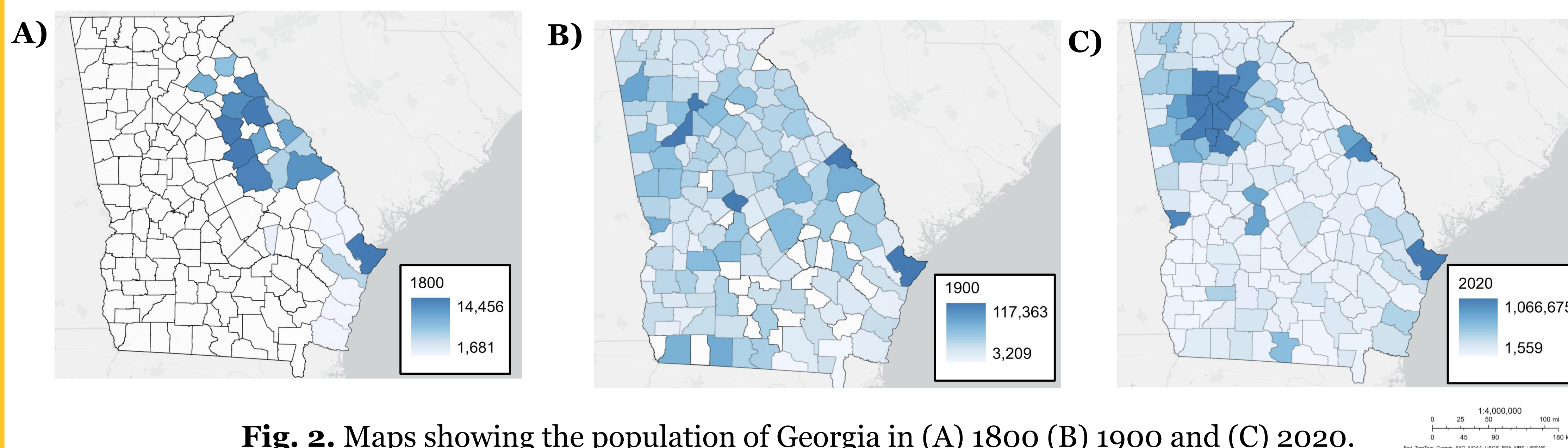
The population drift towards urban areas seen in Figs. 2B and 2C are only matched by gubernatorial homes in the last fifty years (Fig. 1E). Under the County Unit System (Fig. 1D), no governor was elected from an urban county.

Since 1962, more governors have been elected from north of the Chattahoochee River (4) than the rest of the state's history combined (3). This suggests that the decreasing power of agriculture in the state's economy is reflected in statewide politics.

Despite being the state's capitol since the 1860s, only one governor has been elected from Fulton County (Atlanta) since the county unit system was instituted in 1917.



**Fig. 1.** Maps showing the homes of Georgia's governors in the years (A) 1776-1825 (B) 1825-1865 (C) 1865-1917 (D) 1917-1962 (E) 1962-2024 and (F) 1776-2024



**Fig. 2.** Maps showing the population of Georgia in (A) 1800 (B) 1900 and (C) 2020.

## Methodology

A majority of the locations of gubernatorial homes come from Cook (2005). Additionally, the *Georgia Historical Quarterly* and the *New Georgia Encyclopedia* were consulted. Population information is from the US Census Bureau. The dividing points for each era are the first gubernatorial election held by popular vote, the end of the Civil War, the start of the County Unit System, and the end of the County Unit System.

Additional reading and the data used to create the maps can be found using this QR code or at this link:

<https://tinyurl.com/yc2aaak5>



## Discussion and Conclusions

In these maps, it is very clear to see how the homes of governors have shifted westward since the 1820s. Before that time, the governors of Georgia were almost exclusively from the coast and near South Carolina. Given that these were the only parts of Georgia that had been open to settlement, this is not a surprise. From 1825 until 1917, the homes of governors were largely clustered between the Fall Line (which runs from Columbus to Macon to Augusta) and the Chattahoochee River. The reason why is an area of further study, though it very likely has to do with the region's fertile soil and large antebellum plantations.

From 1917 onward, the spread of governors has been much more evenly distributed across the state, except for along the coast. The years under the County Unit System show how rural Georgia had very strong control over statewide offices, including the Office of the Governor. Several of the governors elected since 1962 illustrate how urban areas now have a much greater influence in statewide politics.

The only urban area to have a continuous presence is Augusta. Meanwhile, the cities of Savannah, Macon, Columbus, and Atlanta have only been gubernatorial homes sporadically.

## References

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