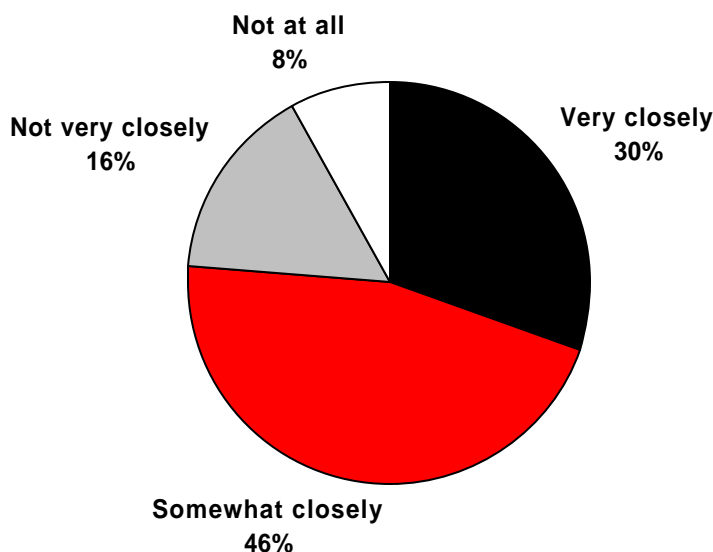


Georgia Public Opinion on the State Flag

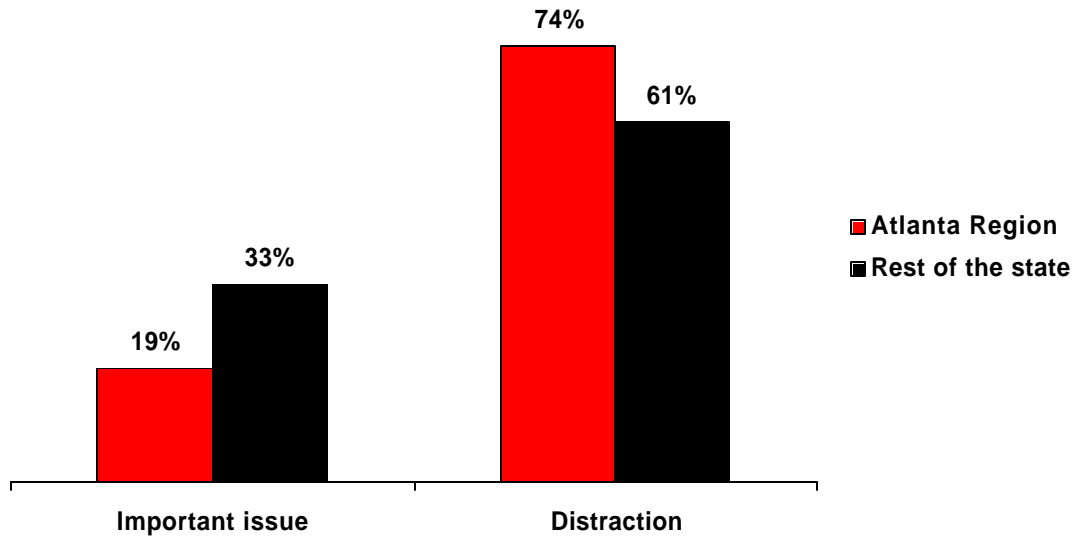
Very few issues have captivated public attention to the degree that the issue of Georgia's state flag has. Seventy-six percent of the Georgia public say they have followed the issue either very closely (30 percent) or somewhat closely (46 percent). Not surprisingly, those who are not following news about the flag closely or not following it at all are more likely to want to leave the issue to their legislative representatives to resolve. A majority of Georgians (53 percent), however, want the chance to vote on which flag should represent their state; only 38 percent, overall, prefer that the issue be left to their elected representatives.

How closely have you followed news about the Georgia state flag?



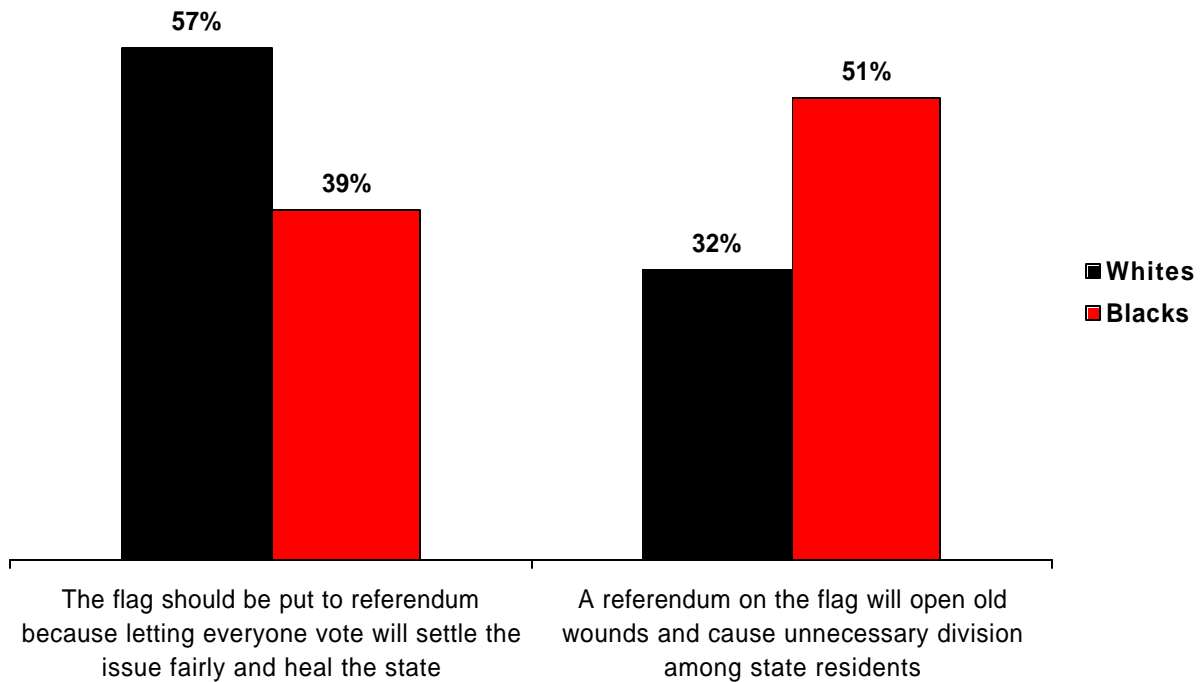
Despite the fact that most Georgians are following the flag issue to some degree, about two-thirds (67 percent) are more likely to say that the flag controversy is more of a distraction from important state issues than it is an important issue in its own right, worthy of debate (26 percent). The perceived importance of the flag issue varies substantially by region of the state. Nearly three-quarters (74 percent) of respondents from the Atlanta metropolitan area are of the opinion that the flag issue is a distraction, while only 61 percent from the rest of the state share that opinion.

Whether or not you've followed the issue closely, which of the following statements come closer to your viewpoint: (A) the state flag is an important issue worthy of extensive debate, or (B) the state flag issue is a distraction from important issues?



Governor Purdue has argued that the process of referenda on the flag issue will help to heal the state, and it appears that a majority of Georgians agree with him on this point. The Peach State Poll asked respondents: “Which of the following statements come s closer to your viewpoint: (A) the flag should be put to referendum because letting everyone vote will settle the issue fairly and heal the state, or (B) a referendum on the flag will open old wounds and cause unnecessary division among state residents?” Fifty-two percent of respondents said that the notion that a referendum will help “heal the state” was closer to their viewpoint. Only 37 percent leaned toward the statement that the referenda process will “open old wounds and cause unnecessary division” in the state. African-Americans in Georgia differ substantially from whites in the state on which statement fits their point of view; 46 percent of African-Americans in Georgia report believing that the referenda will open old wounds, while 45 percent think that the process will help heal the state.

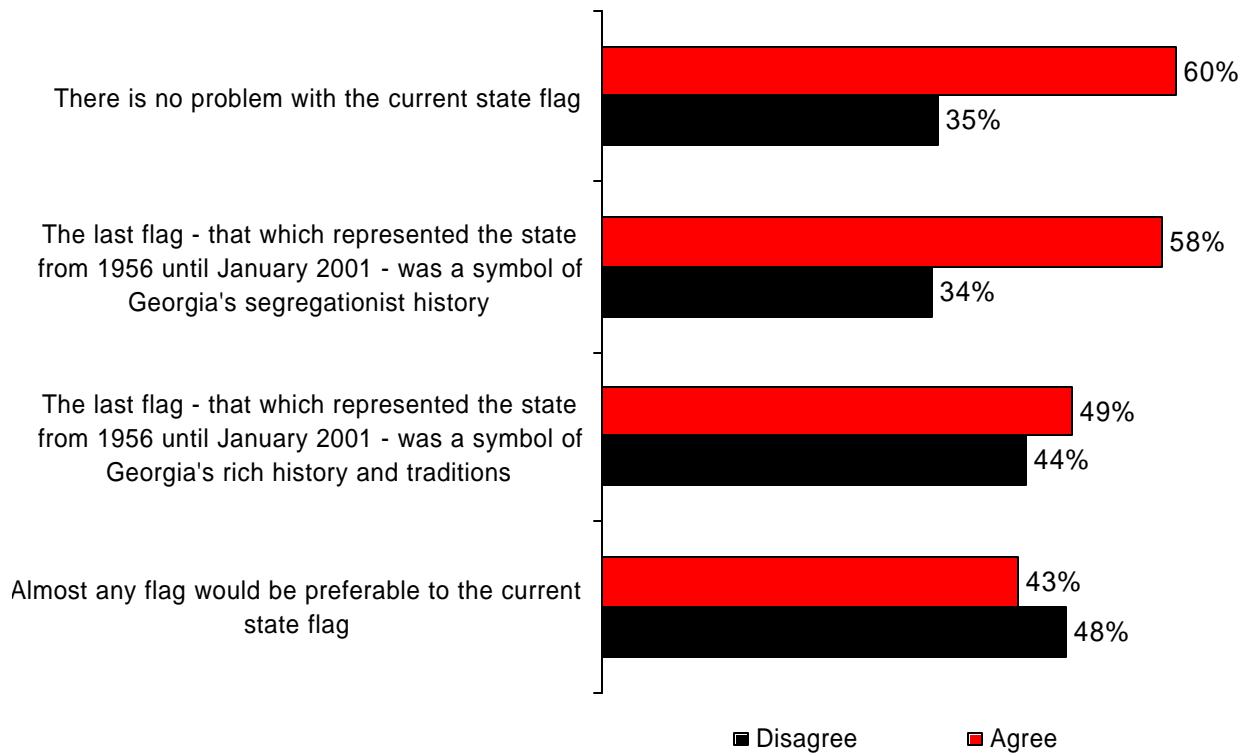
Which comes closer to your viewpoint:



Respondents were read a series of statements in the spring 2003 Peach State Poll with which they were asked to agree or disagree. This series was designed to gauge the attitudes about the current flag and to assess, in part, the meaning of the 1956 flag. Three in five respondents (60 percent) agreed with the statement that “there is no problem with the current state flag”—with 38 percent agreeing “strongly” with that statement. On the other hand, only 43 percent agreed that “almost any flag would be preferable to the current state flag,” and 48 percent disagreed with that sentiment.

As far as the 1956 flag is concerned, 58 percent of all respondents agreed that the 1956 flag “was a symbol of Georgia’s segregationist history.” Forty-nine percent agreed that the 1956 flag “was a symbol of Georgia’s rich history and traditions.” For each of these statements, respondents were more likely to take the more extreme position—strongly agree or strongly disagree—than to moderate their opinion. Also, about 24 percent of respondents agreed with both of the statements above regarding the 1956 flag; although that may seem inconsistent, it is more likely that Georgians see the 1956 flag as having many meanings too complicated to be understood with a small battery of questions. Those who agreed with both statements tended to be younger and less educated than the average Georgian.

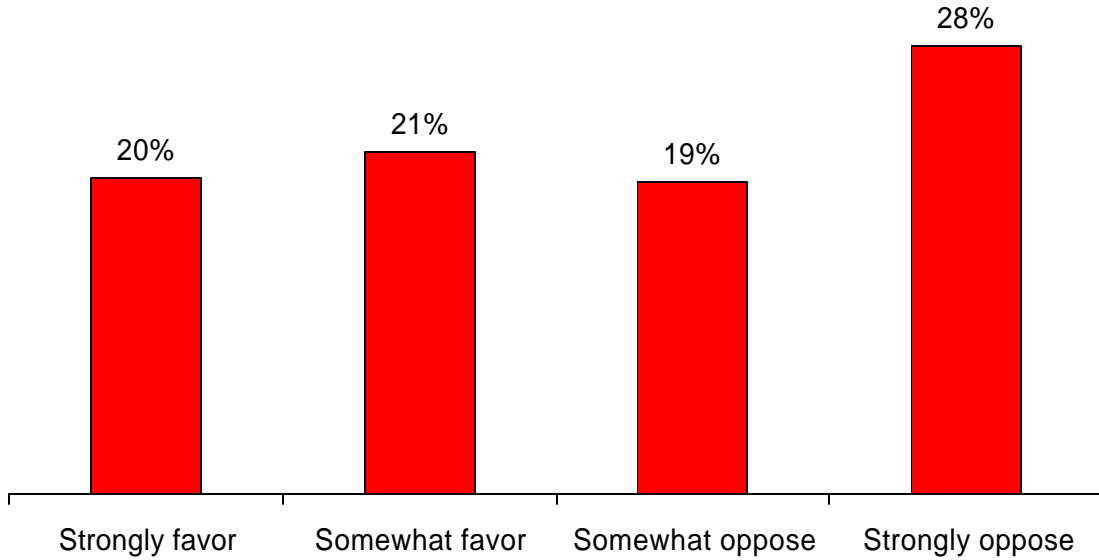
Do you agree or disagree with the following statements:



Most clearly there exists a difference of opinion about the meaning of the 1956 flag along the lines of race. Seventy-nine percent of African-Americans surveyed either strongly agree (59 percent) or somewhat agree (20 percent) that the flag adopted in 1956 is “a symbol of Georgia’s segregationist history.” Only 47 percent of white respondents shared that view.

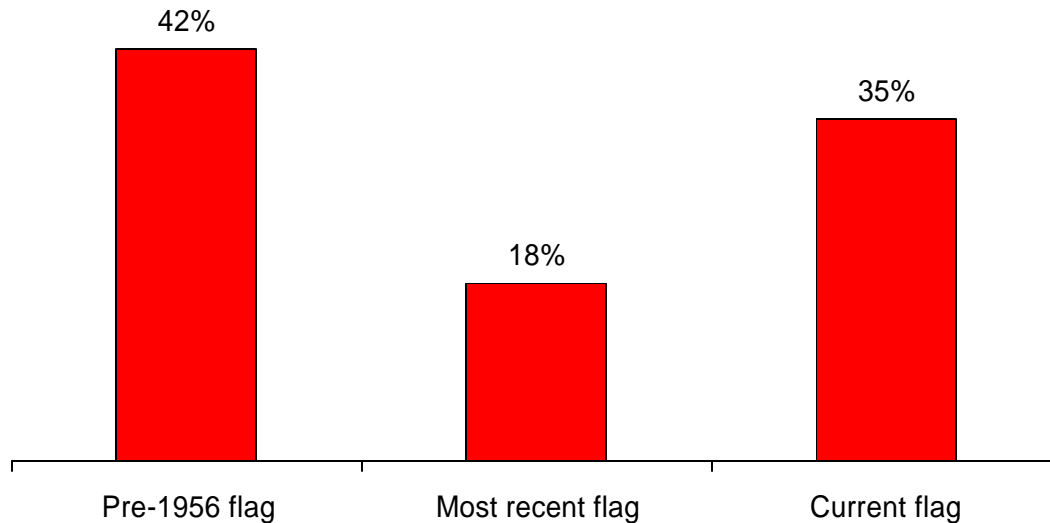
Clearly the process by which the current flag was adopted is more of an issue than the flag itself; 52 percent of the public either strongly oppose (34 percent) or somewhat oppose (18 percent) the way the current state flag was adopted in 2001. Opposition to the way the current flag was adopted is strongly correlated with the desire to vote on the issue as opposed to leaving it up to elected officials.

Regardless of your preference for the design for the Georgia state flag, do you favor or oppose the way that the current flag was adopted?



When given the options of the pre-1956 state flag, the 1956 to January 2001 flag, or the current flag, 35 percent of the public have no preference at this point for one state flag over any other. Of those who have a preference among those three flags, a plurality (42 percent) prefer the pre-1956 flag, followed by the current flag (35 percent); only 18 percent of respondents expressing a preference choose the flag that flew over the capitol from 1956 to 2001.

Which of the three flags do you prefer for the state of Georgia? [Asked only of those who first indicated that they either had a preference or might have a preference (N=471)]



The data presented in this report are taken from a Peach State Poll conducted by the Carl Vinson Institute of Government between March 31 and April 6, 2003. The poll included 800 telephone interviews of randomly selected adults in Georgia. For a sample of this size, the margin of error at the 95 percent confidence level is +/- 3.5 percent. Although sampling error is only one source of potential survey error, all precautions have been taken to minimize other sources of error for this survey.

The Carl Vinson Institute of Government, a public service and outreach unit of the University of Georgia, has as part of its mission to provide policymakers with systematic, objective research to inform policy decisions. In accordance with that mission, the Peach State Poll aims to give voice to the public on important policy matters and issues pertaining to political, social, and economic life in Georgia.

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