Dawn brings fear rather than promise for many Georgia voters

By Katie Leslie and Craig Schneider

Steve Ramey rolled out of bed Wednesday, downed a cup of coffee, and banged out an email affirming his “determination and resolve not to let the election of Obama destroy this nation.” Then he mailed it to 800 people. “We must and will do all we can to save our Home,” he vowed to them.

If Mitt Romney had won, it might well have been Kate Thompson sending out anguished emails. As she awaited the results Tuesday afternoon, Thompson outlined her forebodings in an email to The Atlanta Journal-Constitution:

“A ‘President Romney’ makes my head swim in nightmarish visions of a Handmaid’s tale-like existence in which I am only worth one fertile egg a month,” she wrote. The imagery comes from a novel in which some women are subjugated and forced to bear children.

If Romney were to win, Thompson wrote “then my barriers to a happy life increase tenfold.”

Ramey, 63, an ex-Marine from Lilburn who heads the Founding Fathers Tea Party Patriots, and Thompson, 23, a recent Agnes Scott College graduate from Decatur, reflect the depth of the divide that marked this election. No matter who won the White House, many Georgians were going to wake up Wednesday utterly disgusted, fearful that the winner would take this country down the road to ruin.

Partisanship is as old as the Republic, and political candidates have long cast their opponents in unflattering terms. But experts say this election was marked by the extremity of the divisions as well as the vilification each side leveled at the other.

“There’s been an increase in dislike of the opposing party,” said John Sides, an associate professor of political science at George Washington University.
Romney supporters may take this loss especially hard, because they felt close enough to taste victory, said Andra Gillespie, an associate professor of political science at Emory University.

In any case, she said, the closeness of the popular vote and the configuration of Congress, with each party controlling one house, assures more partisan strife. “Looking ahead, there will be more polarization and gridlock,” she said.

Several factors contribute to the disdain between the camps, experts said. Over the years, redistricting has produced districts skewed strongly to one party or the other, driving centerist candidates out of the political ranks.

The rise of partisan media outlets allows voters to get news shaded to reinforce their opinions. And a growing chattering class of talking heads is forever crafting new attack rhetoric and political messaging, adding gasoline to the fire.

“We are in a more polarized time,” said Kevin Lanning, a political psychologist at Florida Atlantic University. “We just gravitate to like-minded voices.”

The climate of rancor fueled some singular incidents leading up to Tuesday’s vote. Fearful of civil unrest after the election, a Woodstock subdivision alerted residents that the entrance gates would be closed 24 hours a day to everyone but residents.

“We live in strange times,” said Bill Stanley, president of the homeowners’ association at the Cottages of Woodstock. “My job is to protect people.”

From the Twitterverse to the blogosphere, Tuesday night’s discourse sometimes verged on hysteria.

For a taste, one had to look no further than Donald Trump’s tweets. “We should march on Washington and stop this travesty!” The Donald proclaimed as Obama’s electoral votes mounted.

At the Grand Hyatt in Buckhead, Beth Wallace, who sells high-end real estate, watched forlornly as Romney ceded the race to Obama. Later in the day, Wallace said she was shocked that Obama was re-elected, given the nose-dive her industry has taken over the past several years.

“I am just disgusted that there are that many Americans that can’t see we’ve had four years of this man who has done nothing but destroy the economy, increase national debt,” she said. “I really don’t know what I’m going to do.”

Still, with the election in the rear-view mirror, many people look ahead with a hope that the bickering will abate.

In a poll conducted last month for the AJC, a majority of voters from both sides of the aisle said they want Republicans and Democrats to work together to address the country’s challenges.
Wednesday, Gregg Potts, pastor of First Baptist Church, Emerson, in Bartow County, searched for a Bible passage to share with his parishioners, some of whom are conservative.

“You may not agree with President Obama, but he’s the president,” Potts said. “We respect that office, and we pray for him.”

For newlyweds Jessica and Jeremy Poss, a President Romney would have symbolized the promise of enough economic security to start a family. Both of them have full-time jobs – Jessica’s in distribution and Jeremy’s in retail – but Jeremy wants to work in manufacturing.

“I’m mostly afraid that jobs are just not going to come back, and my husband is getting desperate,” said Poss, who lives near Covington.

“Now I’m like, what’s the best town in Canada to move to?” she said, before pausing. “OK, maybe it’s not that bad.”