

Race, Representation, and Local Governments in the US South: The Effect of the Voting Rights Act

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The Voting Rights Act of 1965 redefined race relations in the United States. Yet evidence on its effect on Black office holding remains scant. Using novel data on Black elected officials between 1962 and 1980, we assess the impact of the Voting Rights Act on the racial makeup of local governments in the Deep South. Exploiting predetermined differential exposure of Southern counties to the mandated federal intervention, we show that the latter fostered local Black office holding, particularly in the powerful county commissions, controlling local public finances. In the presence of election by district, covered counties experienced Black representation gains and faster capital spending growth.

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Give us the ballot, and we will fill our legislative halls with men of goodwill.¹ (King 2000)

I. Introduction

Universal suffrage defines modern representative democracies. However, the right to vote is often not sufficient to advance the interests of traditionally disadvantaged groups. As group identity of elected office holders can substantially contribute to shape policies, provide role models, and weaken stereotypes, many countries have adopted strong remedial measures to promote minority representation known as political reservation.² Minority representation has been and remains central in the United States. Yet the United States has not pursued mandated representation, relying instead on courts to enforce the antidiscriminatory provisions of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965. The purpose of this paper is to study whether such arguably less intrusive measures advanced representation of African Americans.

Defined by President Lyndon B. Johnson as “one of the most monumental laws in the entire history of American freedom,” the VRA abolished obstacles to Black voters’ registration (chiefly, literacy test provisions) and put in place special measures—known as *coverage*—mandating federal scrutiny over Southern states with a history of Black disenfranchisement.³ The elimination of literacy test provisions led to an immediate and sharp increase in Black voters’ registration and turnout, making them a political force to be reckoned with (Wright 2013; Cascio and Washington 2014). But whether

Shepsle, Ebonya Washington, Gavin Wright, and Noam Yuchtman as well as seminar audiences at the European University Institute, Harvard University, King’s College London, New York University Abu Dhabi, Oxford University, University of Sheffield, University of California San Diego, University of Warwick, York University, the Brunico Political Economy workshop, European Political Science Association (Brussels), the London School of Economics–New York University conference, Midwest Political Science Association (Chicago), and the Nottingham Interdisciplinary Centre for Economic and Political Research conference (Nottingham) for useful comments and suggestions. We are also grateful to the editor and three referees of this journal, who helped us improve the paper significantly. Replication files are provided as supplementary material online. This paper was edited by James J. Heckman.

¹ Address delivered at the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom on May 17, 1957.

² For instance, gender quotas are present in more than 100 countries (Besley et al. 2017) and minority reserved seats in more than 30 (Krook and O’ Brien 2010). For evidence on their effects on policy making, see Pande (2003) and Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004).

³ Jurisdictions that imposed a test or device restricting the right to vote and experienced a turnout less than 50% in the previous presidential election were covered under Section 5 of the VRA. As a result, they were subject to preclearance by federal authorities of any change affecting the voting process. Of the 11 states of the former Confederacy, six (Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Virginia) were fully covered, and one state (North Carolina) was partially covered (i.e., of the 100 North Carolina counties, 39 fell under the provision of Sec. 5). Arkansas, Florida, Tennessee, Texas, and 61 North Carolina counties were instead not covered.

Black political participation led to actual representation is unclear, since powerful obstacles to the election of African Americans remained.⁴ Thus, while hoping that the VRA would eventually “lead to Negro state representatives, county commissioners, sheriffs, city councilmen, police chiefs and even mayors” (King 1965), the civil rights movement leadership knew that the road to Black office holding was paved with obstacles. Did the VRA live up to its promise?

Race remains one of the most debated issues in American politics, but we still have limited evidence on whether, when, and how one of the arguably most important pieces of civil rights legislation led to gains in Black office holding. In this paper, we make progress on these important questions by carrying out the first systematic assessment of the VRA’s impact on the racial makeup of all local governments in the US South between 1962 and 1980. We provide evidence that coverage increased Black representation at the local level, and it did so soon after its introduction. Importantly, these gains were not limited to minor offices, as they extended to powerful elective bodies, such as county commissions.

For our analysis, we assembled a novel data set on local Black elected officials in the 11 states of the former Confederacy, digitizing information from the National Roster of Black Elected Officials (NRBEO) on African Americans serving on county governments, municipal governing bodies, and school district boards between 1962 and 1980. To identify the effects of the special measures introduced in 1965, we proceed in two steps. First, given the salience of race, we expect the effect of coverage to be greater in areas with a larger share of African Americans. Hence, a straightforward way to estimate the VRA’s effect is to investigate how the relationship between the preexisting share of Blacks and Black office holding changed over time within covered counties. Second, since these areas might have experienced an increase in Black representation even in the absence of the VRA’s provisions, we use a comparison group that includes counties of the former Confederacy with a similar history of slavery and Black disenfranchisement that were not covered in 1965. In other words, we estimate whether covered counties with a larger preexisting Black population (treatment group) experienced a larger increase in Black office holding—from before to after the VRA—when compared with noncovered counties (control group). While we cannot test our identifying assumption, our

⁴ Despite the special measures introduced by the VRA, a prevailing culture of white supremacy and intimidation practices discouraged Blacks from running for office (Andrews 1997). Moreover, in the presence of racially polarized voting, majoritarian electoral rules made it difficult to elect minority candidates. Hence, federal- and state-level gains in Black office holding have been linked to the increase in majority-minority districts, which took place more than 20 years after the passage of the VRA (Handley and Grofman 1994). Finally, even when Blacks were the majority, as in several local elections, their chances of winning office were hampered by tactics to dilute the Black vote (Parker 1990; Trebbi, Aghion, and Alesina 2008).

analysis indicates that these two groups shared similar trends prior to the VRA on a wide variety of political outcomes.⁵

One concern with our research design is that the share of African Americans was on average larger in covered than in noncovered counties. This imbalance poses two potential threats to identification. First, the difference between treatment and control groups could be problematic if the effect of the preexisting share of Blacks on electoral outcomes was purely driven by counties in covered states with Black population shares outside of the common support. Second, heterogeneity on observables increases the sensitivity to potential bias due to unobserved covariates. Since matching on pretreatment variables reduces both bias and heterogeneity (Rosenbaum 2005), we address these concerns by deploying a geographic regression discontinuity (GRD) design, where we compare more homogeneous contiguous counties spanning the border between covered and non-covered states.

Our baseline triple-differences results show that coverage had a sizeable impact on the extent to which enfranchisement led to Black office holding. The latter was driven by the election of Blacks to county governments (most notably, county commissions) rather than municipalities and school boards. In particular, counties with larger Black population shares in the treatment group experienced an additional increase in the share of African American commissioners twice as large as that in the control group. Our results also hold when we deploy the GRD design. Thus, in contrast to anecdotal evidence suggesting that Blacks were elected to only minor offices,⁶ we find that coverage significantly increased their representation in county commissions, the most important local government bodies in the US South. Moreover, preexisting electoral rules mattered: gains in Black office holding took place only in covered counties where commissions were elected by single-member districts (SMD) rather than at large.⁷ This indicates that the enforcement of the VRA's provisions tackling vote dilution tactics (i.e., preclearance) were effective. On the other hand, the lack of progress in covered municipalities and school boards is consistent with the fact that both inherited from the Progressive Era

⁵ As discussed in sec. V.C, given that coverage was targeted to jurisdictions with the worst discrimination records, a priori we would expect that in the absence of the VRA's provisions, covered counties would have experienced worse outcomes in the post-VRA period. In other words, negative selection into treatment could—if anything—bias our estimates downward.

⁶ The effectiveness of the VRA in promoting Black representation was often questioned by civil rights activists and the popular press. For example, in its March 1976 edition, *Ebony* reported, "Most of the Black officials holding county offices have been elected as justices of the peace, constables, or school board members rather than to posts of greater policy making authority" (Poinsett 1976).

⁷ In at-large elections, the majority at the local level (e.g., county, city) elects all the representatives.

at-large electoral rules, unfavorable to minorities, which remained in place throughout the 1970s.

In the US South, county governing bodies play a very prominent role in the provision of essential public services and infrastructure (Wager 1951). Did Black political empowerment affect local public finances? Black disenfranchisement at the end of the nineteenth century (Kousser 1992) resulted in a decline in public goods provision in Black communities (Margo 1990; Valelly 2004). Poor schools and inadequate basic infrastructures (Jones 1917; Valelly 2004) became hallmarks of Southern Black communities. Despite improvements in water supply and sanitation before World War II (Troesken 2004) and in school funding from the 1940s onward (Margo 1990), the gap between Black and white communities in local public goods provision was still large in the early 1960s (Button 1989; Wright 2013). Thus, the election of Black commissioners—besides enhancing descriptive representation of previously disenfranchised African Americans—could fundamentally change their substantive representation in the domain of chronically underprovided local public goods,⁸ which were perceived as highly salient.⁹

As we have argued, Black voters were more likely to elect Black officials in SMD elections. Civil rights activists saw descriptive representation as the primary route to advance African American interests. The increased likelihood of Blacks gaining office could also matter in more subtle ways: greater political competition could enhance the accountability of white officials to the Black electorate. Hence, electoral rules favorable to the empowerment of Blacks should more generally lead to policy gains for African American communities. To test this proposition, we deploy again a differences-in-differences design, where we exploit two sources of heterogeneity—coverage and preexisting electoral rules—to estimate whether covered counties with larger shares of Blacks, electing commissioners by SMD, experienced a different spending pattern from before to after the VRA.

We show that by the late 1970s, covered SMD counties with larger fractions of African Americans—which before the VRA did not display different spending patterns—experienced a faster growth in local capital expenditures, financed mainly through debt. At the same time, we do not uncover different patterns for current outlays, which include payments

⁸ In our context, descriptive representation captures the alignment of elected representatives and voters along the racial dimension, whereas substantive representation refers to the pursuit of the interests of the Black community in the policy domain. For a more general discussion, see Pitkin (1967).

⁹ As pointed out by Wirt (1997, 69), “Many Blacks had first wanted their local representatives to be symbolic, that is, to be Black like themselves. In time though, they wanted representatives to provide individual or group services and to secure the public policies that would provide sufficient resources.”

for welfare and salaries. These results continue to hold in the GRD design. We conclude that Black empowerment led to increased local public goods provision but not to larger individual transfers. The salience of local public goods provision for the Black electorate and the fact that—unlike current spending—capital investments are largely exempt from balanced budget rules and essentially financed by borrowing can provide a rationale for this pattern.

Seven days after the VRA's enactment, Martin Luther King Jr. highlighted the crucial role of its provisions: "We now have a federal law which can be used, and use it we will." The federal law was indeed used, with immediate effects, in the most staunch segregationist states. In the year before the passage of the VRA, none of the 81 counties in Mississippi had any Black local elected officials. Three years later, Blacks held offices in 12 counties; some 15 years later, they were serving in 52 counties. The federal scrutiny mandated by coverage worked: in less than two decades, it transformed the racial makeup of local governments and brought tangible gains in public investments to Black communities in the Deep South.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section II reviews the related literature. Section III provides background information on the VRA and its enforcement. Section IV introduces the data set used in the analysis, and section V presents our main results. Section VI studies the effect of Black representation on local public spending, and section VII concludes.

II. Literature Review

Our paper contributes to different streams of the literature. Models of identity politics underscore the importance of descriptive representation as a precondition for substantive representation (Besley and Coate 1997). This argument provides a rationale for interventions, such as political reservation (Besley et al. 2017), and, more broadly, for measures promoting the representation of enfranchised minorities. The VRA is an example of the latter. However, its effectiveness has been questioned, since the rise in minority representation at the state and federal level has been disappointingly slow.¹⁰ At the local level, where the journey toward minority representation likely began, systematic evidence on the impact of the VRA on Black office holding remains scant.¹¹ In this paper, we fill this gap using

¹⁰ The increase in Black representation at this level has been attributed to the increase in majority-minority districts, which took place more than 20 years after the passage of the VRA (Handley and Grofman 1994).

¹¹ Several studies have analyzed the patterns of elected officials by race throughout the 1970s, typically focusing on cross sections of cities. Davidson and Grofman (1994) examine a sample of 1,060 cities in covered states, selected on a combination of population and ethnic composition thresholds. Considering an initial period varying between 1970 and 1980

a novel data set covering Black elected officials across all levels of local governments in the states of the former Confederacy before and after the passage of the VRA. Importantly, by deploying a differences-in-differences identification strategy and a GRD design, we can assess the effect of the VRA on Black representation by comparing differences in patterns—from before to after the VRA—between covered and noncovered counties with very similar initial characteristics. This approach also allows us to study the differential effect of the legislation across local offices, including county commissions, which exercise control over local public finances.

Our paper also relates to previous work on the effect of the VRA on public spending. Husted and Kenny (1997) have provided evidence of an increase in state spending on social welfare following the removal of literacy tests and poll tax provisions. Cascio and Washington (2014), focusing instead on electoral turnout and state transfers to localities, have shown that the extension of the voting franchise led to an increase in transfers toward Black communities, even though state governments did not see tangible gains in Black office holding. The latter implies that descriptive representation can be ruled out as a driving factor of state spending decisions. By shifting the focus from state to local elections, we find instead that the extension of the franchise led to an increase in public goods provision only within covered counties with rules more favorable to the election of Blacks. These results, while confirming the relevance of electoral rules for minorities' political empowerment (Trebbi, Aghion, and Alesina 2008), are also consistent with models of identity politics highlighting the role of elected representatives' characteristics in shaping policies (Corvalan, Querubin, and Vicente 2020), especially when they belong to traditionally underrepresented groups identified by race, ethnicity, or gender (Pande 2003; Besley et al. 2004, 2017; Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004).

Our paper also contributes to the literature on the effects of the voting franchise on spending on public goods as opposed to targeted individual transfers.¹² In the standard setup (Meltzer and Richard 1981), the extension of the franchise leads to a greater demand for redistribution, typically in the form of individual transfers. Lizzeri and Persico (2004) emphasize instead how the extension of the voting franchise could drive

and a final period in the late 1980s or early 1990s, they show that the largest gains in Black representation took place in cities that switched from elections at large to SMD. Marshall, Ruhil, and Shah (2013) analyze a panel of city councils, using data from the International City/County Management Associations at 5-year intervals between 1981 and 2006, and find that the likelihood of having at least one Black councilor in a municipality and the number of elected Black councilors are positively correlated with coverage. Marshall, Ruhil, and Shah (2010), focusing instead on a sample of 300 school boards and councils between 1980 and 2000, find that the odds of Black winning office increase with elections by SMD.

¹² For an overview of the literature on electoral incentives and public spending, see Ting, Snyder, and Hirano (2018).

efficiency-enhancing growth in public goods provision with diffuse benefits. Consistent with their prediction, our results indicate that the VRA increased the provision of public goods (e.g., capital spending on infrastructure) rather than targeted individual transfers. This finding corroborates the arguments put forward by Wright (2013) that gains achieved by Blacks did not take place at the expense of white Southerners because Black political participation facilitated biracial cooperation toward mutually beneficial goals, including investment on growth-enhancing policies.¹³ This “biracial coalition for economic growth” (Wright 2013) might have also played a role in explaining why Black office holders were influential, even though they typically remained a minority group within local elected bodies. To sum up, focusing on local governments, our analysis contributes to the literature by showing that the VRA brought tangible improvements to Black communities in terms of both representation and public spending.

III. The 1965 Voting Rights Act

The ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment of the US Constitution in 1870 explicitly prohibited the denial or abridgment of the right to vote on account of race. In the following two decades, the US South experienced a notable increase in African American political participation, fostering both descriptive and substantive representation. Black office holding led to an increase in local tax revenues and an improvement in Black literacy rates (Logan 2020). However, by 1895, most states of the former Confederacy established voting registration procedures to circumvent the Fifteenth Amendment (Kousser 1992). The procedures were brutally effective: by the beginning of the twentieth century, African Americans’ disenfranchisement was virtually complete (Wright 2013) and many of their policy gains reversed (Margo 1990; Valelly 2004; Logan 2020). White supremacy, Black economic coercion, and the manipulation of democratic institutions shaped the former Confederacy into an enclave of authoritarian rule (Mickey 2015), which persisted until the mid-1940s. Around this period, the civil rights agenda began to gain traction in the Democratic Party (Kuziemko and Washington 2018). At the same time, the Supreme Court issued landmark civil rights rulings, tackling some important aspects of racial discrimination.¹⁴ Still, efforts to overcome Black disenfranchisement continued to be frustrated—in the words of Attorney General Katzenbach—by “evasion, obstruction, delay and disrespect” and required

¹³ As emphasized by Wirt (1997, 69), “Whites reported that Black empowerment had helped them overturn the old powers and the planters who had blocked racial and economic change.”

¹⁴ Among the most important rulings of this period, see *Smith v. Allwright* (1944), which struck down the white primary, and *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which established the unconstitutionality of racial segregation in public schools.

the right to vote to be vindicated “in suit after suit, in county after county,” with negligible practical effects.¹⁵ Therefore, a need was identified for “a new approach, an approach which goes beyond the tortuous, often ineffective pace of litigation. What is required is a systematic, automatic method to deal with discriminatory tests, with discriminatory testers and with discriminatory threats.”

The 1965 VRA offered such a method. Special provisions were devised for jurisdictions where the potential for discrimination was believed to be the greatest. In the words of Attorney General Katzenbach, the bill “is designed to deal with the two principle means of frustrating the Fifteenth Amendment: the use of onerous, vague, unfair tests and devices enacted for the purpose of disenfranchising Negroes, and the discriminatory administration of these and other kinds of registration requirements. . . . Experience demonstrates that the coincidence of such schemes and low electoral registration or participation is usually the result of racial discrimination in the administration of the election process.” Therefore, to tackle this problem, Section 4 of the VRA devised a formula to identify covered jurisdictions as those states and their political subdivisions that at the same time (1) imposed a test or device to restrict the right to vote and (2) experienced a turnout below 50% in the previous presidential election. In 1965, six of the 11 formerly Confederate states—Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Virginia—and 39 counties of North Carolina fell into this category. Under Section 5, the US District Court for the District of Columbia or the attorney general had to provide preclearance of any change in legislation affecting voting. Furthermore, the attorney general had the right to dispatch federal examiners to covered jurisdictions and, specifically, to request federal monitoring of polling places. Last, the VRA forced all covered jurisdictions to eliminate literacy test provisions, which de facto prevented Blacks from registering to vote.

Coverage was an unprecedented federal intervention on matters typically reserved for states by the Constitution.¹⁶ The legislation created a new status quo, dramatically reducing the ability of state and local governments to circumvent the Fifteenth Amendment. However, the enforcement of the VRA was far from smooth. States strategically used redistricting to dilute the Black vote. As a result, less than a third of the majority African American counties elected a Black state representative by the early 1980s. At the local level, where redistricting was difficult or impossible, intense battles focusing on electoral rules raged in courts throughout the 1970s. Traditionally, the selection of local officials took place either in

¹⁵ Statement before the House Judiciary Committee, rendered on March 18, 1965, page 4.

¹⁶ In fact, its constitutionality was immediately but unsuccessfully challenged in *South Carolina v. Katzenbach* (1966). Coverage provisions have remained in place until 2013, when the Supreme Court struck down Section 4 as unconstitutional (*Shelby County v. Holder* [2013]).

at-large elections, where the majority at the local level (e.g., county, city) elected all the representatives, or in district systems, where representatives were instead chosen in districts or local wards.¹⁷ District-based systems helped minority candidates and came increasingly under attack. Preclearance became crucial to block this type of vote-diluting practices. Switches toward elections at large were successfully challenged in court under Section 5 so that covered states could retain district-type elections.

Immediately following the VRA's passage, Black elected officials began to serve on county governments, municipalities, and school boards, where virtually no African Americans had been in office since the time of Reconstruction. Reports of Black office holding gains started to regularly make the headlines of local newspapers, suggesting that Black enfranchisement was fundamentally changing the makeup of locally elected bodies.¹⁸ While bringing African Americans into office was one of the most important objectives of the VRA, the evidence on its immediate effect remains largely anecdotal. In this paper, we address this gap by assessing how the VRA's special provisions changed local governments in the US South.

IV. Data

The main goal of our analysis is to study the link between the enfranchisement of Black voters in the US South and their ability to elect officials at the local level. In particular, we want to empirically assess whether counties with larger Black population shares covered by the VRA experienced a significant change in the racial composition of their local elected bodies. Additionally, we investigate whether electoral rules played a role in the election of minority officials and the evolution of local public finances. To carry out our analysis, we have built a rich data set, which is described below.

A. *Local Black Elected Officials*

While biographical data on members of the US House of Representatives and Senate are easily available from the Congressional Directories, similar information on local elected officials at the county, municipality,

¹⁷ City councils and school boards were predominantly elected at large, whereas elections by district were more common for county commissions. Some local governments also adopted proportional representation systems earlier in the twentieth century but discarded them shortly thereafter. See Trebbi, Aghion, and Alesina (2008) for more details.

¹⁸ In 1967, just 2 years after the passage of the VRA, e.g., the Voter Education Project (VEP) News reported, "A little over four years ago, not a single Negro was registered to vote in West Feliciana Parish in Louisiana. . . . Today Negro registration totals over 2,000, or 56 percent of the parish's total registration. . . . Last year, two Negroes were elected to the school board. This year, challenging political control of a parish in which violence and intimidation have not been uncommon, 17 Negro candidates awaited the November primary. When the results were in, six of the candidates had won. Having the vote obviously makes a difference in West Feliciana Parish." Source: VEP News, Atlanta, Georgia, November 1, 1967.

and school board level is much more difficult to obtain and has not been systematically collected throughout the period covered in our study.

In the context of a broad effort to promote Black political engagement, in the eve of the VRA, the Southern Regional Council's Voter Education Project started to record data on Blacks elected to public office at both the national and the local level. As a result, a directory—the NRBE0—began to be published in 1969, reporting the name, office held, and address of all Black elected officials. The roster has been subsequently updated for slightly over two decades at a yearly frequency by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, becoming the most authoritative source of data on Black elected officials in the United States.¹⁹

The NRBE0 directory has been built with information obtained from a variety of sources. First, questionnaires were mailed to all known Black office holders (i.e., those listed in the previous year's roster) asking them to verify the data available to the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. In addition, they were requested to give the expiration date of their current term in office and to provide the names of any other Black officials they knew. All newly acquired names of Black elected officials were then verified by phone call to the appropriate local jurisdiction. Approximately 60% of the questionnaires were returned in a typical year. When questionnaires were not returned, calls to verify the existing data were made to a variety of local administrative bodies. The Joint Center research staff also regularly reviewed news clippings from throughout the country to gather information on Black office holders. In addition, government offices, associations of public officials, state offices of major political parties, and organizations concerned with Black political participation periodically provided names of new office holders. Even if the goal of the roster was to provide comprehensive information on Black elected officials at the national, state, and local levels, the data collection methodology has improved over time.²⁰ As a result, undercounting of Black elected officials is more likely to have occurred during the first years of data collection, when the system for gathering information was still being perfected.²¹

¹⁹ The NRBE0 directory has been routinely used in US Census publications (e.g., the Statistical Abstract of the United States) since the US Census has directly collected information on Black elected officials through the Census of Governments only in 1987 and in 1992.

²⁰ As reported in the 1971 publication, "As of March 1971, according to our records, the Roster is up to date and comprehensive. However, in our effort to compile the information, we became aware of the possibility that Black elected officials in some parts of the nation might not have come to our attention and, therefore, could be missing from the Roster. Such may be the case even though we have checked and double-checked the sources and have received timely assistance from many individuals and organizations in amassing the voluminous data."

²¹ To verify the quality of the information from the NRBE0, we have compared it with the Census of Governments of 1987, which is the closest official publication to our period of study reporting a breakdown of local elected officials by race. Restricting our attention to county-level officials (where both the NRBE0 and the US Census use the same geographical

The roster is available only in paper format. For this reason, to carry out our analysis, we have constructed and digitized counts—at the county level—of the number of Black elected members of county governments (commissions, judiciary and law enforcement bodies, and other offices), municipalities, and school districts for the 11 states of the former Confederacy. For the period prior to the introduction of the VRA, no systematic effort to identify local Black elected officials had instead been carried out, “the chief reason being that such a phenomenon was virtually unknown” (Voter Education Project 1969). Still, in some constituencies, Blacks did run for office and were elected before 1965. Using information from the Southern Regional Council papers and local newspapers archives, we have been able to also collect this data for 1962 and 1964. While some measurement error is unavoidable, our figures are consistent with aggregate counts that have been published at the time (Voter Education Project 1969). Thus, combining these different sources, our study focuses on Blacks elected to all local offices between 1962 and 1980 across the 11 states of the former Confederacy.

Our data indicate that in 1964—the year immediately prior to the passage of the VRA—a total of 67 local and state Black elected officials were in power: 56 held positions at the local level, whereas 11 had been elected to state houses and senates. By 1980, this number had increased more than thirtyfold. As a result, there were 2,265 Black elected members of county governments, municipalities, and school districts and 142 Black state representatives and senators. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the geographic patterns of Black representation at the local level across counties in 1964 and 1980. In 1964, only 23 counties (i.e., 2% of the total) had at least one Black elected official, and Calhoun county in Alabama had the largest Black representation in the US South, with seven individuals in office.²² No clear geographic pattern can be identified though. By 1980, on the other hand, 488 counties (or 44% of the total) had at least one Black elected official, and Bolivar county in Mississippi had 56. Noticeably, at the time of the passage of the VRA, no county in Mississippi had any local Black elected official. By 1980, counties electing Blacks were also clearly concentrated in covered states (65% of them). Furthermore, as shown in figure A1, by 1980, the geographic distribution of Black representation closely followed the distribution of African Americans in the total population.

Focusing on the year prior to the passage of the VRA (1964) and on the last year of our sample (1980), we report in table A1 summary statistics for

unit of observation) and to the 1987 directory of the NRBO (which matches the survey period used in the US Census), we find that out of 1,023 entries (the US Census did not include information for the 75 counties in Arkansas), an exact match between the two sources is obtained 894 times (or 87.39%). Importantly, differences between unmatched observations by coverage status are not statistically significant at conventional levels.

²² Hobson City in Calhoun county was Alabama’s first self-governed, all-Black municipality.

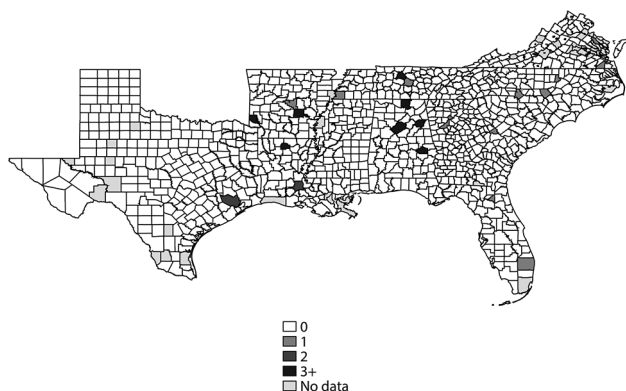


FIG. 1.—Number of Black elected officials, 1964.

the variables used in our analysis, distinguishing between counties that were covered or not covered in 1965. Our main variable of interest is the share of Blacks elected to each local office, which is defined as

$$\text{ShareBlackElected}_{cot} = \frac{\text{BlackElected}_{cot}}{\text{Elected}_{cot}}, \quad (1)$$

where c , o , and t denote county, office, and year, respectively. For the numerator, we use the information we have collected from the NRBEQ, whereas for the denominator, we use data from the Census of Governments for 1957, 1967, and 1977, reporting the total number of elected officials for county governments (commissions, judiciary and enforcement bodies, and other offices), municipalities, and school districts, aggregated at the county

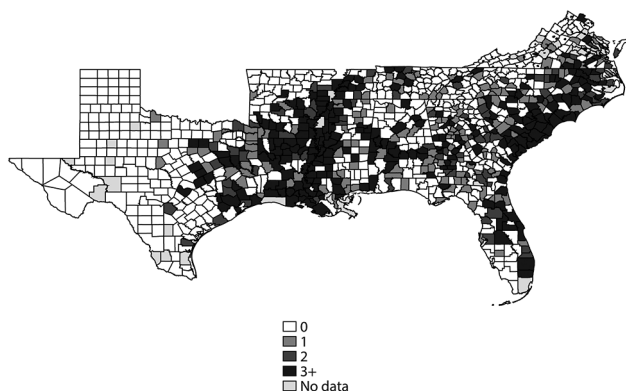


FIG. 2.—Number of Black elected officials, 1980.

level.²³ Unfortunately, there is no separate information available for each county government category. As a result, to compute the share of Blacks in each different type of county government, we use the total number of elected officials in county governments as the denominator.

As shown in panel A of table A1, in covered counties, the proportion of Blacks in all local governments rose from 0.11% immediately before the VRA to 5.22% by the early 1980s. The increase was much more modest in counties that were not covered, where the average share of Black elected officials in the last year of our sample was only 1.55%. In terms of representation at specific levels of government, our data indicate that the largest increase occurred in school districts in covered counties. From a situation in which there were no Black elected officials in 1964, by 1980 5.42% was Black; this change was much larger than the one observed in noncovered counties, where the increase was from 0.07% in 1964 to 1.40% in 1980. As for municipalities, in covered counties we observe an increase in Black representation from 0.18% in 1964 to 5.21% in 1980; in noncovered counties, the corresponding change was from 0.05% to 1.86%. Last, Black representation in county governments went from 0.04% in 1964 to 3.64% by 1980 in covered counties, while the corresponding figure in 1980 was only 0.63% for noncovered counties. Overall, most of the increase in county governments is accounted for by county commissions.

B. Other Variables

The control variables we use in our analysis are summarized in panel B of table A1 and have been obtained from various sources (described in the appendix). As we can immediately see, covered counties were characterized by a much higher Black population share than those not covered (32.50% vs. 13.18%); they were also smaller and less urban and had a lower agricultural productivity. As for the counties' economic characteristics, they share similar unemployment rates (4.96% in covered counties and 4.87% in noncovered ones), and poverty was very widespread: 46% of the population in covered counties lived in households falling below the poverty line, and the corresponding figure for noncovered counties was only slightly lower at about 44%. The vast majority of the population—74% and 71% in covered and noncovered counties, respectively—was unskilled. Finally, covered counties were characterized by greater racial

²³ The number of elective officials was relatively stable over time. In particular, between the first and the last year of the sample, on average it increased from 17 to 21 for county governments and from 26 to 27 for municipalities, whereas it decreased from 18 to 17 for school districts. For county governments, the variation followed the same pattern in covered and noncovered counties. On the other hand, the number of those elected in municipalities (school districts) slightly increased (decreased) in noncovered counties only.

tension, as measured by the number of episodes of both pro-Black and anti-Black protest registered between 1960 and 1964.

Summing up, we find that covered and noncovered counties differed in terms of several observable characteristics, and some of these differences (e.g., the share of Blacks) are large and statistically significant. For this reason, besides directly accounting for these differences in our empirical specifications, in section V.D we assess the robustness of our findings implementing a GRD design, where we take advantage of the fact that counties spanning the border between a covered and a noncovered state are more similar than a pair of counties taken at random, also with respect to the share of African Americans in the population.

V. The VRA and Black Elected Officials

We are now ready to analyze the effect of the VRA on electoral outcomes. We begin by discussing our identification strategy. Then, we turn to the presentation of an event study and of the long difference estimates. We subsequently present our GRD design to address potential threats to identification and finally investigate the role of electoral rules.

A. *Estimation Strategy*

Before 1965, seven states of the former Confederacy—Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia—adopted restrictions to the franchise (e.g., literacy tests), which were administered in a discriminatory fashion to disproportionately affect Black voters. The VRA, together with the removal of literacy tests, brought in special provisions (coverage) targeted at those jurisdictions where the potential for discrimination was believed to be the greatest. As coverage was meant to protect Black voters from the infringement of their political rights, we expect its impact to be larger in areas where the share of African Americans was higher.

In principle, the special measures introduced by coverage did not need to result in an increase in votes for Black candidates, as the newly enfranchised Black voters did not necessarily have to cast their ballot along racial lines. However, the VRA came into place in a context of extreme racial tensions, where the election of Black candidates had a highly symbolic value. The importance of the race dimension in the electoral context of the post-VRA period is epitomized by the words of the first African American running for office in Edgefield county, South Carolina: “There’s an inherent value in office holding. . . . A race of people who are excluded from public office will always be second class.”²⁴ Thus, given the salience

²⁴ Quoted by Wright (2013, 202).

of race, we posit that the effect of the VRA on Black office holding at the local level should depend on the county preexisting share of Blacks. Hence, a straightforward way to estimate the effect of the VRA on Black representation would be to investigate how the relationship between preexisting Black population shares and the proportion of African Americans elected in local governments changed over time within counties covered under Section 5 of the VRA. In particular, if the legislation had an effect, we would expect the slope of this relationship to increase around the time of the passage of the VRA.

One important problem with this type of strategy is that areas with larger shares of Blacks in the population might have seen increases in Black representation even in the absence of the specific provisions included in the VRA. For example, civil rights activism could have led to greater Black efforts to cast a ballot in local elections, even in the absence of coverage, and this could have led to an increase in Black representation. For this reason, following Cascio and Washington (2014), we combine the strategy discussed above with the creation of a comparison group including the four states of the former Confederacy (Arkansas, Florida, Tennessee, and Texas) and 61 counties in North Carolina, with a similar history of slavery and Black disenfranchisement, which were not covered in 1965. In other words, we estimate whether covered counties with a larger preexisting Black population (treatment group) experienced a greater increase in Black representation—from before to after the VRA—when compared with the counties of the other former Confederate states that were not covered (control group). Note that even if Southern counties were very similar in that they did not elect Black officials before 1965, coverage was targeted to jurisdictions with the worst discrimination records. Hence, *a priori* we would still expect that in the absence of the VRA, covered counties would have experienced worse outcomes after 1965. In other words, negative selection into treatment could bias our estimates downward. We address these concerns in section V.C.

B. Event Study

To illustrate the evolution of the relationship of interest, we plot in figure 3 the coefficients obtained by regressing the share of Black office holders in the congressional election years on the 1960 Black share separately by year and treatment status. In all our specifications, we also include state fixed effects²⁵—so that the coefficients capture within-state patterns—and a number of other pre-VRA county characteristics, including unemployment rate, percentage of families below the poverty line, percentage of unskilled, agricultural productivity, population (ln), percent urban, and

²⁵ Separate indicators for covered and noncovered counties in North Carolina.

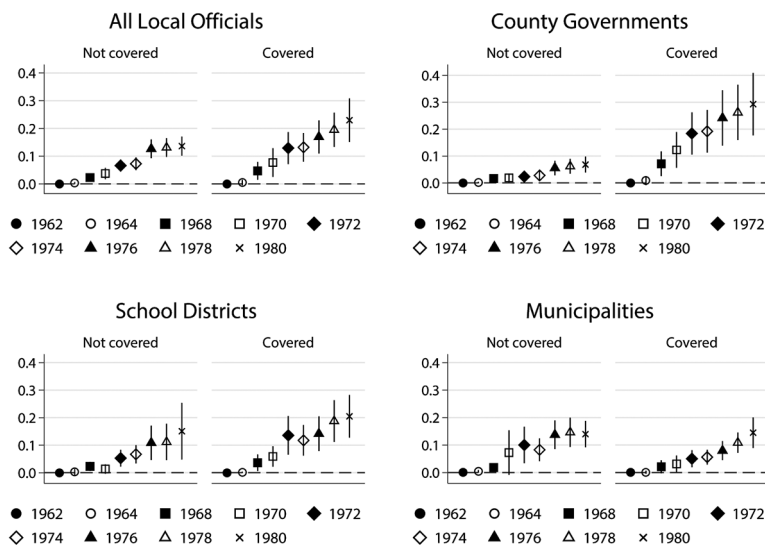


FIG. 3.—Trends in gradient of Black elected officials in 1960 percent Black, by treatment status and type of office. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Robust standard errors are clustered by judicial divisions. State trends are included. Controls: unemployment rate (%), 1960; families below poverty line (%), 1960; low skilled (%), 1960; population, 1960; urban population (%), 1960; agricultural productivity; pro-Black protest, 1960–64; anti-Black protest, 1960–64.

pro- and anti-Black activism. Clockwise from the top left, we consider all local elected officials, county governments, municipal governments, and school districts, respectively.

Our estimates indicate that in the period before the passage of the VRA, the relationship between the share of Black officials and the 1960 share of Blacks in the population was not different from zero for either the treatment or the control group. After 1965, a different pattern emerges: the relationship becomes positive, and for counties in the treated group, it is steeper than for those in the control. The differential change in slope is evident already in the 1968 election, where a 10 percentage point increase in the 1960 share of Blacks in the population is associated with a 0.46 percentage point increase in the share of Black officials in covered states and a 0.22 percentage point increase in those that were not covered. By 1980, a 10 percentage point increase in the 1960 share of Blacks is associated with an increase of around 2.3 percentage points in the share of Black elected officials in covered states and only about 1.3 percentage points in the share of Black elected officials in noncovered states. The change in the slope of the relationship is more striking when we look at

county governments, whereas the pattern is less clear for school districts and municipalities.

Next, we investigate the statistical significance of this differential pattern for the various local offices. We do so by estimating the following model:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{ShareBlackElected}_{cst} = & \sum_{n>1962} \gamma_n D_n^t \text{PercentBlack}_{1960} + \sum_{n>1962} \theta_n D_n^t \text{PercentBlack}_{1960} \\ & \times \text{Covered}_{cs} + \mathbf{X}_{cs}' \beta + I_{st} + I_c + \epsilon_{cst}, \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

where $\text{ShareBlackElected}_{cst}$ is the share of Black elected officials in county c of state s at time t , $\text{PercentBlack}_{1960}$ is the Black share in 1960, Covered_{cs} is an indicator taking a value of 1 if the county was covered in 1965, D_n^t is an indicator taking a value of 1 if $n = t$, \mathbf{X}_{cs}' is the vector of pre-VRA controls introduced above, I_{st} are state-year interactions, and I_c are county fixed effects. Since district courts played a fundamental role in the enforcement of the VRA, election outcomes in counties falling under the same judicial division could be correlated.²⁶ Hence, in all our specifications, we cluster standard errors at the judicial division level. Since in our specification we include county fixed effects, we omit the interactions with the first year of the sample to identify the model; that is, we use the first year (1962) as the reference for evaluating how the slope of the relationship between the share of Black officials and the 1960 share of Blacks in the total population changed over time. In figure 4, we plot the estimated coefficients θ_n , which capture the difference in the gradient between covered and noncovered counties.

As we can see from the top left panel, when we consider all local elected officials, the treatment-control difference is broadly positive, statistically significant, and increasing over time. This overall pattern is very clearly driven by county governments. In school boards and municipal governments, on the other hand, we do not observe significant differences by treatment status.

The absence of significantly different pre-VRA trends in Black office holding between treatment and control groups in our event study is reassuring and consistent with the notion of the former Confederacy as an enclave of authoritarian rule (Mickey 2015).²⁷ However, by the mid-1940s,

²⁶ District courts have original jurisdiction of all civil actions arising under the constitution, laws, or treaties of the United States (28 US Code, 1331, Federal Question). District courts are organized by judicial divisions serving groups of counties. As a result, in every state we have been able to map counties to their respective judicial division, using information obtained from the US Attorney's Office or the US District Courts. Our overall sample includes 137 judicial divisions. For more details, see the appendix.

²⁷ White supremacy, Black economic coercion, and the manipulation of democratic institutions (e.g., voting registration requirements, white primaries, and malapportionment of state legislatures) were key to the suppression of Black voting rights and the establishment of the Southern enclave.

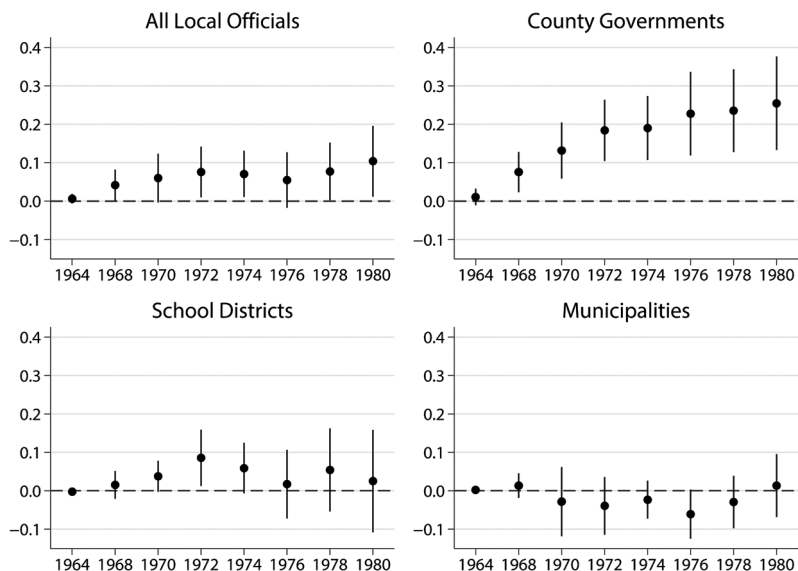


FIG. 4.—Difference in gradient of Black elected officials in 1960 percent Black between covered and noncovered counties, by type of office. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Robust standard errors are clustered by judicial divisions. State trends and county fixed effects are included. Controls: unemployment rate (%), 1960; families below poverty line (%), 1960; low skilled (%), 1960; population, 1960; urban population (%), 1960; agricultural productivity; pro-Black protest, 1960–64; anti-Black protest, 1960–64. Omitted interaction: 1962.

important differences between the Deep South and the outer South started to emerge.²⁸ This raises the possibility of selection into treatment, which might not be detectable simply because no Blacks were elected to office before the VRA in either the control or treatment groups. To address these concerns, in table 1 we analyze pre-VRA patterns in factors that have been associated with the evolution of the Southern enclave. In particular, panel A focuses on pre-VRA trends, and panels B and C focus on the corresponding final and initial levels. In columns 1–3, we consider proxies of white supremacy (Ku Klux Klan [KKK] and lynching) and Black labor coercion

²⁸ For example, thanks to the efforts of civil rights organizations like the NAACP, in 1944 with *Smith v. Allwright*, the white primary was struck down as unconstitutional. The ruling was met by fierce resistance in the Deep South, whereas the outer South was more acquiescent. At the same time, as the civil rights agenda began to gain traction in the Democratic Party, racially conservative whites started to voice their opposition by supporting Republican candidates in presidential elections (Kuziemko and Washington 2018). As for state-wide offices, the Democratic Party retained its dominant position, and for gubernatorial races, the Democratic primary was the decisive election, attracting more attention and more voters than the general election (Jewell 1977).

(share of land devoted to cotton production). We find evidence of significant pretrends for only the latter variable. In column 4, we consider the evolution of Black political activism (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [NAACP]), and again we do not uncover significant differences. Turning to political outcomes, in columns 5 and 6, we study differences in the reaction to partisan realignment on civil rights. First, we compare support for the 1964 Republican presidential candidate Barry Goldwater—who ran on a largely anti-civil rights platform—with that of Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1952, and then, more broadly, we consider long-run changes in Republican presidential support between 1940 and 1960. While we do not uncover a pretrend between 1952 and 1964, the analysis on levels shows increased support for both Goldwater and Eisenhower in covered counties, which is consistent with the dealignment of the South driven by racially conservative whites in the post-World War II period (Kuziemko and Washington 2018). We also find some evidence of a pretrend in Republican support between 1940 and 1960, although this is significant only at the 10% level. At the local level, the dominance of the Democratic Party in gubernatorial elections might obfuscate important changes in allegiances taking place within the party.²⁹ Hence, we also examine patterns in the competitiveness of gubernatorial races as captured by the vote share received by the lead candidate. The results reported in column 7 indicate that covered counties with a larger share of African Americans do not display different patterns. In columns 8–11, we focus on turnout, which was affected by institutions such as the white primary,³⁰ and legislative malapportionment, giving disproportionate power to racially conservative rural areas.³¹ Our results (cols. 8, 9) show that while turnout grew in Black counties with larger Black shares, there was no differential pattern by coverage status. As for malapportionment (cols. 10, 11), we do not detect any significant differences, and given that electoral rules were stable during this period, this is consistent with the absence of demographic trends documented in columns 12 and 13.

To summarize, we find very limited evidence of pretrends, and when we do, the estimated effects point toward negative selection into treatment: covered counties with larger shares of Blacks were slower in moving away from cotton production, were historically linked to the social and economic coercion of African American labor, and experienced more opposition

²⁹ Southern Democratic politicians, who resisted the civil rights agenda pushed by the Northern wing of the party and embraced by Democratic presidents (Beck 1977; Carmines and Stimson 1989; Kuziemko and Washington 2018), started to face opposition from other Southern Democrats favoring reconciliation with the National Party (Mickey 2015).

³⁰ In particular, as the South diverged in its response to the 1944 *Smith v. Allwright* Supreme Court ruling, which struck down the white primary, covered counties could display different patterns of African Americans' political participation as captured by presidential and gubernatorial turnout.

³¹ See Mickey (2015, 70).

TABLE 1
DEPENDENT VARIABLE: PRE-VRA TRENDS AND LEVELS IN CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVISM, RACIAL COMPOSITION, ATTITUDES, AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

	KKK (1)	Lynching (2)	Cotton (3)	NAACP (4)	Goldwater (5)	Republican (6)	Governor Win (7)	President Turnout (8)	Governor Turnout (9)	State House (10)	State Senate (11)	Population (12)	Percent Black (13)
	A. Trend (Overall Sample)												
Black share (%):													
1960 × coverage	.0002 (.0005)	.0002 (.0026)	.0580*** (.0167)	.0053 (.0061)	.0022 (.0042)	.0065* (.0034)	.0000 (.0020)	-.0001 (.0014)	.0019 (.0021)	.0007 (.0009)	.0005 (.0009)	.0477 (.0761)	.0047 (.0121)
1960	.0006 (.0004)	-.0026 (.0018)	-.0479*** (.0152)	-.0034 (.0041)	.0233*** (.0027)	.0141*** (.0024)	.0004 (.0016)	.0042*** (.0014)	.0045*** (.0011)	-.0006 (.0008)	-.0010 (.0007)	.0023 (.0644)	-.0299*** (.0103)
Adjusted R^2	.1889	.0177	.1460	.0008	.8291	.7516	.3147	.7830	.8780	.6479	.4314	.6147	.1825
Observations	1,022	1,022	1,022	1,022	1,012	1,010	1,012	1,021	1,007	1,022	1,022	1,022	1,022
	B. Final Level (Overall Sample)												
Black share (%):													
1960 × coverage	-.0002 (.0004)	-.0004 (.0004)	.0106 (.0403)	.0072 (.0075)	.0033** (.0015)	.0074*** (.0021)	.0005 (.0018)	-.0011 (.0016)	.0002 (.0017)	-.0023 (.0027)	-.0000 (.0026)		
1960	.0011*** (.0003)	.0001 (.0001)	.0082 (.0361)	-.0042 (.0050)	.0002 (.0013)	-.0088*** (.0016)	.0015 (.0014)	-.0075*** (.0014)	-.0075*** (.0010)	.0029 (.0022)	.0017 (.0016)		
Adjusted R^2	.2371	.0139	.2517	.0008	.6539	.3480	.5470	.5308	.7937	.5204	.4403		
Observations	1,022	1,022	1,022	1,022	1,022	1,020	1,012	1,022	1,021	1,022	1,022		

C. Initial Level (Overall Sample)												
Black share (%):												
1960 \times coverage	-.0004	-.0006	-.0474	.0019	.0086***	.0011	.0005	-.0011	-.0017	-.0030	-.0005	
1960	(.0003)	(.0026)	(.0369)	(.0015)	(.0022)	(.0038)	(.0014)	(.0013)	(.0022)	(.0025)	(.0024)	
Adjusted R^2	.0005*	.0027	.0561*	-.0008	-.0092***	-.0232***	.0010	-.0117***	-.0121***	.0035*	.0027**	
Observations	(.0003)	(.0017)	(.0321)	(.0010)	(.0015)	(.0026)	(.0013)	(.0010)	(.0013)	(.0019)	(.0013)	
	.0383	.0213	.3355	.0046	.7005	.7587	.6466	.7950	.8658	.3748	.3399	
	1,022	1,022	1,022	1,022	1,022	1,012	1,018	1,021	1,007	1,022	1,022	
D. Trend (Border Sample)												
Black share (%):												
1960 \times coverage	.0007	-.0007	.0005	-.0017	.0118	.0112*	-.0087	-.0052	-.0014	.0007	.0020	-.0076
1960	(.0006)	(.0070)	(.0158)	(.0026)	(.0087)	(.0062)	(.0082)	(.0047)	(.0099)	(.0039)	(.0043)	(.0197)
Adjusted R^2	-.0004	.0109	-.0717***	.0036	.0155	.0151*	-.0002	.0093	.0298**	.0063*	.0059	-.4682*
Observations	(.0014)	(.0156)	(.0249)	(.0026)	(.0098)	(.0088)	(.0105)	(.0059)	(.0146)	(.0033)	(.0039)	(.0392)
	.4120	.1510	.6340	-.0743	.6449	.5806	.2515	.1382	.3047	.2063	.0363	.3492
	250	250	249	250	250	250	250	250	250	250	250	250

NOTE.—Robust standard errors (in parentheses) are clustered by judicial divisions in panels A–C and by judicial divisions and border segments in panel D. State trends are included in panels A–C, and county pair and coverage trends are included in panel D. Controls in panels A–C: unemployment rate (%), 1960; families below poverty line (%), 1960; low skilled (%), 1960; population, 1960; urban population (%), 1960; agricultural productivity.

* Statistically significant at the 10% level.

** Statistically significant at the 5% level.

*** Statistically significant at the 1% level.

to the civil rights agenda as white voters started to desert the Democratic Party. Thus, had coverage not been put in place, these counties would have experienced a smaller increase in Black office holding over the period of our analysis. At the same time, since in the pre-VRA period elected officials in noncovered counties could be less racially conservative, after the VRA's passage, voters might be more inclined to keep incumbents in office rather than replacing them with Blacks. In other words, the steeper relationship between Black office holding and preexisting share of African Americans in covered counties could be due to differences in turnover driven by preexisting incumbents' characteristics rather than coverage per se. To address this concern, we investigate whether covered counties display different patterns of turnover. Measuring incumbency requires information on the names of local elected officials, which is available for the most important county government—the commission—from state-specific publications and archival sources for 10 Southern states over our entire sample period.³² We have digitized the names of all county commissioners to first construct an incumbency indicator using information between adjacent elections and then compute the share of commissioners in a given county that has been reelected into office for the relevant term.³³ Figure 5 illustrates the change in the average incumbency rate between 1960 and 1980. While we observe a modest overall decline, there is no clearly discernible pattern.³⁴ In particular, changes in incumbency do not appear to be concentrated in covered counties or in those counties with larger shares of African Americans.

Still, to systematically investigate the relationship between the incumbency rate and the pre-VRA share of Blacks over time, we use once again an event study approach. The top panel of figure 6 reports the treatment-control difference in the incumbency rate, whereas the bottom panel reproduces the event study for Black elected commissioners on the same sample. While the patterns for Black elected commissioners are in line with our previous findings, the results for the incumbency rate indicate the absence of significant differences by treatment status. Hence, while it is possible that in the pre-VRA period white incumbents in noncovered counties might have been less racially conservative, we do not find evidence that after the VRA, counties with larger shares of African Americans

³² The official publication in Tennessee systematically reports only the name of the commission chair, omitting the other members. For this reason, we cannot include this state in this analysis. See the appendix for more details.

³³ Commissioners' term lengths vary by state and county, with the typical term being either 2 or 4 years and with the possibility of staggered elections. Using all this information, we have built a county average incumbency rate. To study the evolution of incumbency over time, we average incumbency rates over each presidential term to obtain a balanced set of counties throughout the entire period (1960–80).

³⁴ The average incumbency rates in 1960 and 1980 were 64.5% and 63%, respectively.

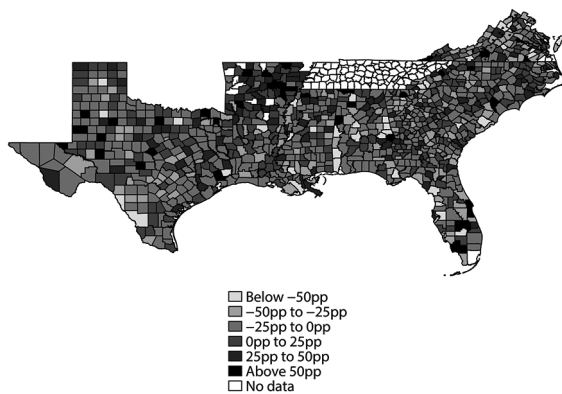


FIG. 5.—Change in incumbency rate, 1960–80.

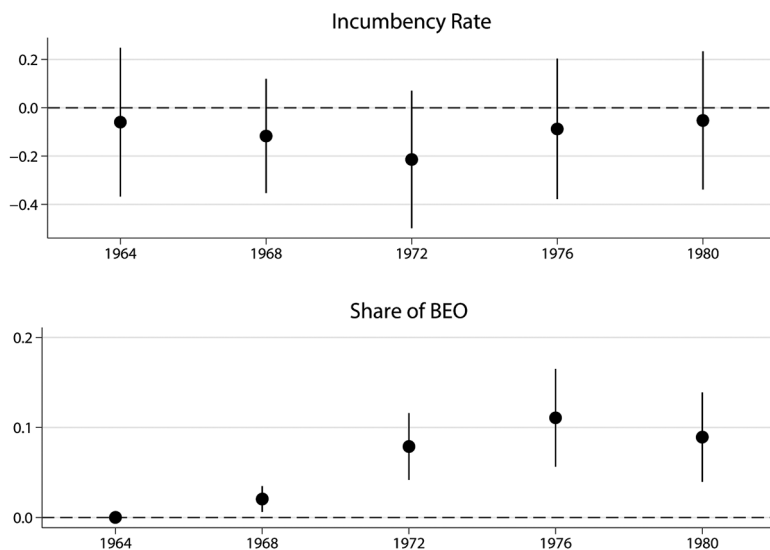


FIG. 6.—County commissioners: difference in gradient of incumbency and Black elected officials in 1960 percent Black between covered and noncovered counties. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Robust standard errors are clustered by judicial divisions. State trends and county fixed effects are included. Controls: unemployment rate (%), 1960; families below poverty line (%), 1960; low skilled (%), 1960; population, 1960; urban population (%), 1960; agricultural productivity; pro-Black protest, 1960–64; anti-Black protest, 1960–64. Omitted interaction: 1960.

in the population were more inclined to keep them in office at the expense of electing new Black candidates to replace them. To conclude, we find limited evidence of pretrends in county characteristics (e.g., pre-VRA cotton share and Republican support) pointing to negative selection and possible downward bias. Still, to mitigate these concerns, we add pre-VRA cotton share and Republican support as controls in all our specifications.

C. Long Difference Estimates

The evidence we have presented so far is consistent with the idea that coverage had an effect on the election of Blacks at the local level and, in particular, in county governments. To summarize our main findings and, later on, to assess the robustness of our results, we now turn to a triple-differences model à la Cascio and Washington (2014), in which we use data from two periods, one before the introduction of the VRA (1964) and one after the adoption of the VRA (1980).³⁵ We omit data for the years in between mainly because—as we pointed out before—the collection of information on Black elected officials carried out by the NRBE0 significantly improved over time.

More precisely, we use a long-run difference model of the following type:

$$\begin{aligned} \Delta ShareBlackElected_{cs} = & \gamma PercentBlack_{1960} + \theta PercentBlack_{1960} \\ & \times Covered_{cs} + \mathbf{X}'_{cs}\beta + I_s + \epsilon_{cs}, \end{aligned} \quad (3)$$

where the dependent variable $\Delta ShareBlackElected_{cs}$ is the change in the share of Black elected officials in county c of state s between 1964 and 1980 and I_s is a state fixed effect (capturing a state-specific trend in this long difference specification). \mathbf{X}'_{cs} is a vector of pre-VRA county characteristics, including the unemployment rate, the percent of families below the poverty line, the percent of unskilled workers, agricultural productivity, population (ln), percent urban, cotton share, pro- and anti-Black activism, and Republican share. The coefficient γ captures the within-state change in the gradient of the 1960 Black population share in the control group, whereas $\gamma + \theta$ does the same in the treatment group. As before, we are interested in the difference between the two, captured by the coefficient θ .

Table 2 presents our baseline regressions, focusing on the change in the share of all Black elected officials, which includes individuals elected to all county governments, municipalities, and school districts. Column 1 reports the findings from a parsimonious specification—where we control for only the share of Blacks in 1960—and its interaction with the coverage indicator. Counties with a larger pre-VRA Black population elect a greater

³⁵ As shown later in this section, our findings are robust to the choice of different end periods.

TABLE 2
OLS MODELS (Dependent Variable: Change in Black Elected Officials, 1964–80)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Black share (%):				
1960 × coverage	.042*	.092**	.106**	.103**
	(.022)	(.042)	(.042)	(.045)
1960	.126***	.135***	.131***	.136***
	(.013)	(.017)	(.016)	(.017)
State trends	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Economic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Other controls	No	No	Yes	Yes
Coverage × controls	No	No	No	Yes
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.437	.498	.515	.516
Observations	1,048	971	971	971

NOTE.—Robust standard errors (in parentheses) are clustered by judicial divisions. Controls: unemployment rate (%), 1960; families below poverty line (%), 1960; low skilled (%), 1960; population, 1960; urban population (%), 1960; agricultural productivity; cotton share (%), 1964; pro-Black protest, 1960–64; anti-Black protest, 1960–64; Republican share (%), 1964.

* Statistically significant at the 10% level.

** Statistically significant at the 5% level.

*** Statistically significant at the 1% level.

proportion of Black officials; furthermore, the change in elected officials from before to after the VRA in the treatment group is significantly larger than in the control group. In column 2, we add economic and demographic controls as well as state-specific trends to account for unobserved, state-specific time-varying shocks. In column 3, to account for anti-civil rights sentiment and racial tension recorded in the years prior to the passage of the VRA, we use the share of Republican vote in the 1964 presidential election and two additional measures for pro- and anti-Black protests between 1960 and 1964.³⁶

Electoral outcomes are shaped by the political participation of all voters (not just African Americans), which may in turn vary depending on the county’s demographics, economic characteristics, political orientation, preexisting party structures, and so on. For this reason, and in line with Cascio and Washington (2014), in column 4 we interact all our controls with coverage status. Overall, the estimated coefficients reported in table 2 confirm that Black office holding grew faster in covered counties with a larger share of African Americans, and this finding is very robust across alternative specifications.

How large is the effect of the VRA on the change in the share of local Black elected officials 15 years after its introduction? Our preferred specification

³⁶ For more details on the construction of the variables, see the appendix. The coefficient estimates of all explanatory variables included in the various specifications of table 2 are reported in table A7. The results indicate that Black office holding grew more in larger counties and in those that experienced more pro-Black activism and less in those that voted more heavily for Goldwater in the 1964 presidential election.

in column 4 of table 2 indicates that a 10 percentage point increase in a county's share of Blacks in 1960 leads to a 1.3 percentage point increase in the share of Black elected officials in noncovered states and an additional 1 percentage point in covered states.

In panel A of table 3, we investigate the effects of the VRA on Black representation across different types of local offices, using the same specification as in column 4 of table 2. In columns 1–3, we analyze county governments; in column 4, we consider municipal governments; and in column 5, we examine school boards. The estimation results in table 3 confirm the findings we have uncovered in our event study, using all the years between 1964 and 1980. As we can see in columns 1–3, coverage led to an increase in Black representation in all county governments, but the effect was much larger for county commissions and law enforcement bodies (cols. 1, 2). On the other hand, coverage did not produce larger gains in Black office holding in school districts (col. 4) and municipalities (col. 5).

TABLE 3
OLS MODELS (Dependent Variable: Change in Black Elected Officials, 1964–80)

	COUNTY GOVERNMENTS			OTHER GOVERNMENTS	
	Commission (1)	Judiciary and Enforcement (2)	Other (3)	Municipality (4)	School District (5)
A. Overall Sample					
Black share (%):					
1960 × coverage	.092*** (.030)	.078*** (.021)	.047*** (.015)	.015 (.040)	.021 (.066)
1960	.048*** (.010)	.008 (.005)	.000 (.000)	.143*** (.022)	.168*** (.049)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls × coverage	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Adjusted R^2	.409	.244	.123	.407	.425
Observations	1,009	1,009	1,009	979	831
B. Border Sample					
Black share (%):					
1960 × coverage	.072** (.034)	.078* (.042)	.017* (.009)	.041 (.076)	.090 (.099)
1960	.018 (.044)	.011 (.023)	-.003 (.007)	.230** (.106)	.145 (.148)
Adjusted R^2	.484	.519	.479	.592	.542
Observations	250	250	250	245	222

NOTE.—Robust standard errors (in parentheses) are clustered by judicial divisions in panel A and by judicial divisions and border segments in panel B. State trends are included in panel A, and county pair and coverage trends are included in panel B. Controls in panel A: unemployment rate (%), 1960; families below poverty line (%), 1960; low skilled (%), 1960; population, 1960; urban population (%), 1960; agricultural productivity; cotton share (%), 1964; pro-Black protest, 1960–64; anti-Black protest, 1960–64; Republican share (%), 1964.

* Statistically significant at the 10% level.

** Statistically significant at the 5% level.

*** Statistically significant at the 1% level.

Analyzing Black office holding in all local elected offices across Southern states, we reach the following conclusions. First, while the gains we estimate among law enforcement and other county bodies are consistent with anecdotal evidence of Black officials being elected to relatively minor offices (such as justices of the peace, constables, and clerks), we find that Black representation also increased in the most powerful local governments in the US South: county commissions. Importantly, covered counties with larger Black population shares experienced an additional increase in the proportion of African American commissioners twice as large compared with those not covered. Second, while in the first 15 years after the passage of the VRA coverage was effective in increasing Black representation in county governments, the same is not true for municipalities or school districts. This finding is consistent with previous accounts of Black representation attributing the slow progress in covered municipalities and school districts to the fact that both inherited from the Progressive Era electoral rules unfavorable to minorities, which remained in place throughout the 1970s.³⁷

Our analysis has considered the effect of the VRA up until 1980, assuming a linear relationship and focusing on changes in Black elected officials. In the remainder of this section, we investigate the robustness of our results on each of these dimensions. Starting with timing, in panels B–E of table A4, we carry out a series of robustness checks by choosing different end points for our analysis. First, we show that our findings are not affected if we use 1976, 1978, or the average between 1978 and 1980 as end periods.³⁸ Second, our baseline analysis focused on the first 15 years since the VRA's enactment; that is, we stopped just before the reauthorization of 1982, when a major amendment made it easier to establish the presence of discrimination.³⁹ In panel E, we extend our investigation up to

³⁷ Although systematic data for all school districts and municipal elections are not available, surveys on selected samples indicate that the majority of school districts and municipalities hold at-large, nonpartisan, and off-cycle elections, usually associated with low turnout (Marschall, Ruhil, and Shah 2010). Such rules persisted since legal challenges to elections at large during the 1970s focused mainly on the most important county governments. In particular, using data on challenges to elections at large in covered states from Davidson and Grofman (1994), we find that between 1965 and 1980 the average incidence of challenges to elections at large—computed as the ratio between the number of cases and the number of local government units affected—is 15% for counties but only 5% for municipalities. After 1980, legal action at the municipal level increased, with an average incidence of cases of 13%, suggesting that the effect of coverage on Black representation at the municipal level did take longer to materialize.

³⁸ In table A4, we also show that the results are comparable independent of whether we allow the effects of the controls to vary by coverage status.

³⁹ In particular, in Section 2, the principle of intent to discriminate was replaced with the so-called result test, whereby the constitutionality of any voting law or procedure would be judged against *de facto* discrimination, whether intentional or not. As a result, the Supreme Court ruling on *Thornburg v. Gingles* (1986) established the grounds for drawing majority-minority districts, which have been credited for the subsequent increase in minority representation (Handley and Grofman 1994).

1990. With the important caveat that the 1982 amendment makes it difficult to estimate the causal effect of the VRA's provisions in the subsequent period, our results provide suggestive evidence of an increase in the impact of coverage over time and across office types.

Next, we are concerned that smaller Black communities might see their votes being more easily diluted and, as a result, threshold effects could emerge, leading to a violation of the linearity assumption. To explore this possibility, in figures A2 and A3 we present bin scatterplots of the change in Black office holding against the share of Blacks in 1960, using the same set of controls as in our benchmark specification. Our results indicate that the relationship is essentially linear—confirming the findings of Cascio and Washington (2014)—with the exception of counties with a very large share of Blacks (in excess of 60%), which lie outside of the common support. Importantly, the results of table 3 continue to hold if we restrict our analysis to the common support, even if the coefficients are smaller in magnitude.⁴⁰

Our investigation has focused on changes in the share of Black elected officials. As we have documented in section IV.A, the number of African Americans in office increased dramatically between 1964 and 1980. This would be the only driver of the increase in the share of Blacks elected to office if the number of elective positions would have been constant. However, because of periodic reapportionments and reorganizations of local units of governments, the size of elective bodies might change over time, and this could mechanically affect our measure of Black representation. Furthermore, in the aftermath of the VRA, Southern states took advantage of these mechanisms to strategically suppress elective positions and limit minority access to office (Parker 1990; Komisarchik 2019). Thus, on the one hand, a decline in the number of elective officials could mechanically increase the share of Black elected officials. On the other hand, if strategic suppression was effective, it could lead to a decline in Black representation. To address these concerns, in table 4, we deploy again our triple-difference design, using the size of elective bodies as the dependent variable. Our results show no statistically significant effects for county bodies and school districts. We find instead some evidence of a decline in the number of elective municipal officials in covered counties, which seems consistent with historical accounts of discriminatory suppression practices.

D. Geographic Regression Discontinuity Design

Our baseline results show that coverage significantly increased the extent to which the enfranchisement of African Americans led to Black office

⁴⁰ See panel A of table A3. Panel B shows that our results are also robust to weighting using the 1960 county population.

TABLE 4
OLS MODELS (Dependent Variable: Change in Number
of Members of Elective Bodies)

	County (1)	Municipality (2)	School District (3)
Black share (%):			
1960 × coverage	−.048 (.051)	−.075* (.042)	.009 (.023)
1960	.072 (.049)	.035 (.038)	−.009 (.021)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls × coverage	Yes	Yes	Yes
State trends	Yes	Yes	Yes
Adjusted R ²	.217	.130	.203
Observations	1,008	976	686

NOTE.—Robust standard errors (in parentheses) are clustered by judicial divisions. Controls: unemployment rate (%), 1960; families below poverty line (%), 1960; low skilled (%), 1960; population, 1960; urban population (%), 1960; agricultural productivity; cotton share (%), 1964; pro-Black protest, 1960–64; anti-Black protest, 1960–64; Republican share (%), 1964.

* Statistically significant at the 10% level.

holding in county governments. The absence of pretrends in Black office holding and other measures of political participation and civil society engagement with racial issues lends support to our identification strategy. However, the fact that covered and noncovered counties differed along economic and demographic characteristics we control for may raise further concerns.

In particular, in 1960, the share of Blacks in the total population was substantially larger in covered counties than in noncovered ones. Although there is enough variation in the share of African Americans to ensure the existence of a sufficient degree of common support for the identification of the effects, this imbalance poses two potential threats to identification. First, the difference between treatment and control groups could be problematic if the effect on electoral outcomes was purely driven by counties in covered states outside of the common support, that is, in the top quintile of the distribution. Second, heterogeneity on observables increases the sensitivity to potential bias due to unobserved covariates systematically correlated with coverage status. Since matching on pretreatment variables reduces both bias and heterogeneity (Rosenbaum 2005), we address these concerns by deploying a GRD design where we compare more homogeneous contiguous counties spanning the border between covered and noncovered states. In fact, as shown in figure 7, the difference in average Black population shares between treatment and control groups is not statistically significant for border counties (those whose centroid is located at less than 25 miles from the state boundary). Counties sharing a border between covered and noncovered states are more similar

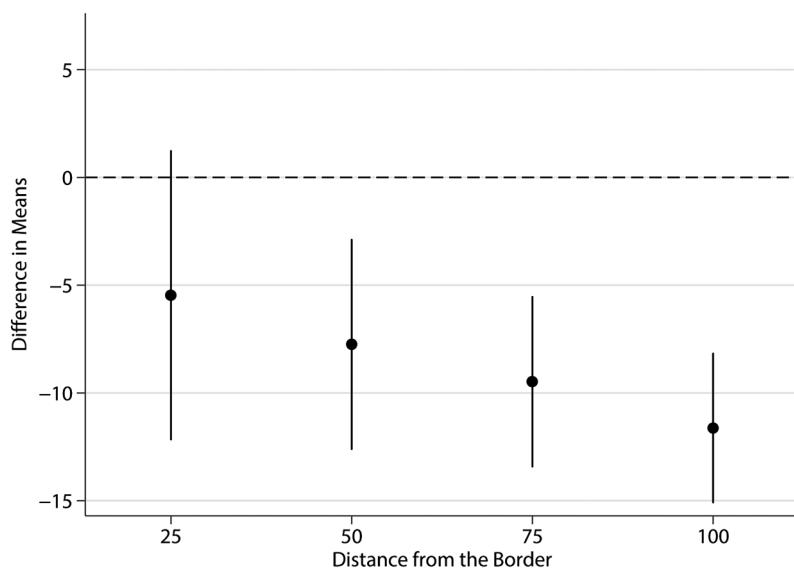


FIG. 7.—Difference in percent Black 1960, by distance from border. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

to each other also with respect to the other covariates used in our model. To see this point, consider figures 8 and 9, where we plot standardized coefficients of the treatment variable obtained from regressions run on both the entire sample and the border sample. As we can see, while in the overall sample we detect some differences by coverage status, county pairs on the border do not exhibit statistically significant differences in pre-VRA covariates values.

Still, some preexisting institutional characteristics might vary discontinuously at the border. Hence, the issue of negative selection into treatment we have already discussed cannot be completely ruled out in the GRD design. To assuage this concern, in panel D of table 1 we repeat the pretrend analysis, focusing on the border sample. Our results indicate the absence of significant pretrends by coverage status, with the only possible exception being the long-run Republican support, which is, however, significant only at the 10% level.⁴¹

Using contiguous counties straddling a common state boundary, we combine our differences-in-differences estimation strategy with a GRD design and estimate whether covered counties with a larger preexisting

⁴¹ In panel A of table A5, we control for the pre-VRA share of the Republican vote, and our results are unaffected.

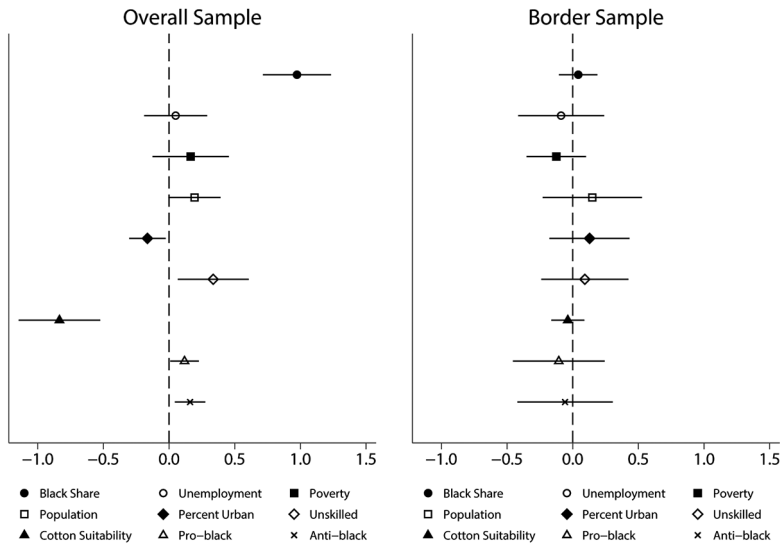


FIG. 8.—Balance in covariate values. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Estimated coefficients are obtained by regressing each variable on the coverage indicator. County pair fixed effects are included in the border specification. Robust standard errors are clustered by judicial divisions in the overall sample and by judicial divisions and border segments in the border sample.

share of Blacks experience a greater increase in Black office holding than noncovered counties with which they share a border, from before to after the passage of the VRA:

$$\Delta Black\ Elected_{cps} = \gamma Percent\ Black_{1960} + \theta PercentBlack_{1960} \times Covered + \mathbf{X}'_{cs}\beta + I_{cp} + \epsilon_{cps}, \tag{4}$$

where $\Delta Black\ Elected_{cps}$ indicates that county c can be repeated for all pairs p it belongs to, straddling a common state boundary. Our specification includes county pair fixed effects I_{cp} (county pair–specific trends in our long-run specification), and standard errors are double clustered by judicial divisions and corresponding border segments. Furthermore, since every county might border several others, observations are weighted by the inverse of the counties’ appearance in the sample.⁴²

Hence, the effect of the VRA on Black representation is identified out of the variation within county pairs spanning the border between covered

⁴² In panel B of table A5, we also report an additional specification without county border weights, and our results are robust.

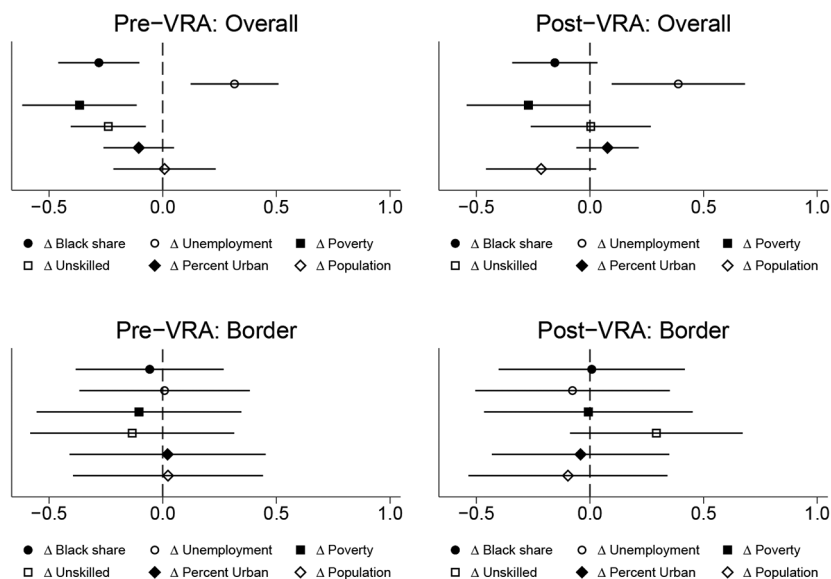


FIG. 9.—Balance in covariate trends. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Estimated coefficients are obtained by regressing each variable on the coverage indicator. County pair fixed effects are included in the border specifications. Robust standard errors are clustered by judicial divisions in the overall sample and by judicial divisions and border segments in the border sample.

and noncovered states. Panel B of table 3 presents the GRD estimation results. Despite the significant reduction in sample size, our main results are broadly robust: compared with noncovered counties on the other side of the border, covered counties experienced a significantly larger increase in the share of Blacks elected to county governments (cols. 1–3), whereas again Black representation in municipalities (col. 4) and school districts (col. 5) is not affected by coverage.

The robust finding on county commissions is particularly meaningful because they are the most important form of local government in the South. Thus, in the remainder of the analysis, we focus on county governing bodies. First, we explore the mechanism by which coverage increased Black representation by considering the role of electoral rules. Next, we assess whether Black empowerment brought tangible gains to Black communities in the form of increased public spending.

E. Electoral Rules and Black Representation

As discussed in section III, covered counties displayed significant differences in the rules shaping the election of county governing bodies. In

particular, at the time of the passage of the VRA, slightly more than half of covered counties chose their governing bodies by district, while the others adopted either elections at large or a combination of the two systems. Theoretically—as shown by Trebbi, Aghion, and Alesina (2008)—the effect of electoral rules on minority representation depends on the size of the group. Elections at large are less favorable to minorities when the latter represent a small share of the total population, because their vote tends to be diluted by this system. In this context, district-based elections are instead more desirable. As the share of minority voters increases, confining them to majority-minority districts would instead tend to reduce their overall ability to gain representation, making elections at large preferable. In practice, as turnout rates are significantly lower for minorities than for the rest of the population—and consistent with the insights from Trebbi, Aghion, and Alesina (2008)—district-based elections have come to be seen as more likely to promote Black representation than at-large systems (Davidson and Grofman 1994).

Given these arguments, it is not surprising that the VRA paid particular attention to electoral rules and the potential changes to them. In particular, through preclearance, covered jurisdictions with existing electoral systems favorable to minorities had a powerful tool to retain them. That the fate of the VRA would largely depend on the enforcement of its key provisions was very clear to the civil rights leadership.⁴³ At the same time, more skeptical views of the VRA have questioned its effectiveness, pointing out that “democracy can not be achieved simply by formal legal manipulations of the sort embodied in the Voting Rights Act” (Salamon and Evera 1973). To shed light on the importance of electoral rules and the enforcement of the VRA’s provisions surrounding them, we explore whether covered counties in states with preexisting electoral rules favorable to the election of minorities experienced larger gains in Black representation.

To address these questions, we collect and exploit information on the electoral rules of county governing bodies as reported by both the 1957 Census of Governments and the 1980 NRBE. Focusing on the electoral rules in place when the VRA was passed, we can distinguish between counties belonging to states that elected their county governing bodies by SMD (Louisiana, Mississippi, and Virginia) as opposed to at-large (Georgia) or mixed systems (Alabama, North Carolina, and South Carolina). In 1980, thanks to the enforcement of preclearance, all three covered states that adopted SMD before the VRA (Louisiana, Mississippi, and Virginia) continued to do so, whereas three covered states (Alabama, Georgia, and

⁴³ As pointed out by Martin Luther King, Jr. (1965), “To become a major turning point in American life, extensive and dynamic enforcement by the Justice Department is indispensable. . . . by bold enforcement the recalcitrance of the segregationists can be made as impractical as it is illegal and immoral.”

TABLE 5
OLS MODELS (Dependent Variable: Change in Black Elected
Officials, County Commission)

	(1)	(2)
Black share (%):		
1960 \times coverage \times SMD	.122** (.054)	.147*** (.040)
1960 \times coverage	.029 (.038)	
1960 \times SMD	-.018 (.029)	
1960	.060** (.027)	.046*** (.010)
1960 \times coverage \times switch		.045 (.031)
1960 \times coverage \times nonswitch/mixed		.013 (.028)
Controls	Yes	Yes
Controls \times coverage	Yes	Yes
State trends	Yes	Yes
Adjusted R^2	.432	.432
Observations	1,009	1,009

NOTE.—Robust standard errors (in parentheses) are clustered by judicial divisions. Controls: unemployment rate (%), 1960; families below poverty line (%), 1960; lowskilled (%), 1960; population, 1960; urban population (%), 1960; agricultural productivity; cotton share (%), 1964; pro-Black protest, 1960–64; anti-Black protest, 1960–64; Republican share (%), 1964.

** Statistically significant at the 5% level.

*** Statistically significant at the 1% level.

South Carolina) were on a transition path toward SMD, and one state (North Carolina) retained a system of elections at large.⁴⁴

In column 1 of table 5, we analyze whether covered counties that retained their pre-VRA SMD system display a different pattern compared

⁴⁴ The transition toward SMD was prompted by the interpretation of the VRA by courts, which broadened the scope for legal action against vote-diluting practices, thus creating the grounds for a shift toward electoral systems more favorable to the election of Blacks. Two influential court cases played a particularly important role. The Supreme Court ruling on *White v. Regester* (1973) and its subsequent application by the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in *Zimmer v. McKeithen* (1973) laid out the standards for evaluating whether at-large elections diluted minority voting strength. The key passage of *Zimmer v. McKeithen*, which became known as the Zimmer formula, augmented the provisions already contained in the *White v. Regester* sentence to include a set of specific criteria, stating that “where a minority can demonstrate a lack of access to the process of slating candidates, the unresponsiveness of legislators to their particularized interests, a tenuous state policy underlying the preference for multi-member or at-large districting, or that the existence of past discrimination in general precludes the effective participation in the election system, a strong case is made. Such proof is enhanced by a showing of the existence of large districts, majority vote requirements, anti-single shot voting provisions and the lack of provision for at-large candidates running from particular geographical subdistricts. The fact of dilution is established upon proof of the existence of an aggregate of these factors.” For an overview of court cases, see Kousser (1992).

with the other counties in the sample. Our main coefficient of interest is thus the triple interaction between the share of Blacks in 1960, coverage, and the SMD indicator. Our estimates show that the interplay between coverage and SMD is key to the election of Black officials since coverage led to an increase in Black office holding only when county commissioners were elected by district.⁴⁵

As court action in the post-VRA period also led to the transition toward SMD in three covered states, in column 2 we present the results of an additional specification where we further decompose the effect of coverage, distinguishing between the early adopters of SMD and those that switched toward it. Our results show that covered counties within states that switched toward SMD also experienced additional gains in Black office holding—albeit smaller than earlier adopters—suggesting that court action behind the switch played an important role. One concern with this interpretation is that court cases might have taken place in states with a more favorable attitude toward minorities, implying that—even without court action—counties with larger Black population shares in those states would have elected more Blacks. Yet the only state that lagged behind in legal challenges to elections at large was North Carolina, by far the most progressive among the covered states. Thus, in the absence of a change in electoral rules, the pattern in Black representation should be the opposite of what we observe: everything else equal, counties in the most progressive covered state (North Carolina) should have experienced larger gains in Black office holding than those in the less progressive ones. Still, the evidence from the switch toward SMD should be interpreted only as suggestive.

The results on the heterogeneous effect of coverage based on preexisting electoral rules implies that preclearance—protecting preexisting SMD arrangements—helped promote growth in Black representation. Thus, contrary to pessimistic views that the VRA could not address the subtle and powerful obstacles to Black political representation entrenched in a culture of white supremacy, our results indicate that the legal tools it provided were crucial to advance Black political empowerment. To be clear, nonlegal barriers to Black political participation were formidable. As “the notion that politics was a ‘white folks’ business’ had been prevalent in Black communities since the turn of the century” (Lewis and Allen 1972), the challenge civil rights organizations faced went beyond simply enrolling Black voters on electoral registers or bringing about legal challenges to ensure the implementation of the VRA.⁴⁶ Thus, the enforcement of

⁴⁵ Our results are also robust to population weighting, trimming the sample to the common support and restricting the analysis to the border sample (see table A6).

⁴⁶ In Martin Luther King Jr.’s (1965) words, “The civil rights movement now has before it a central task: to bring at least a million new southern Negro voters to the polls by next election day. That task is not merely mechanical; however, it is profoundly educational. The Negro

preclearance—beyond its mechanical effect—might have been crucial to give Black voters confidence in their ability to change the racial makeup of elected offices.

VI. Black Elected Officials and Local Public Spending

Our results so far have shown that the VRA—by fundamentally changing the makeup of the electorate in the US South—produced an important shift in the characteristics of individuals elected to local offices. Our analysis has also highlighted that the specific measures put in place by the VRA were crucial to its success. The fact that in just a little over a decade, a minority group—previously banned from the voting booth—was able to elect minority candidates into office is *per se* an important achievement. The election of Blacks had a high symbolic value, as—in the words of civil rights activist Laurence Guyot—it represented “a bit of Black authority, a gradual return to respect for those accustomed to having their lives manipulated by white hands.”⁴⁷

However, Black office holding in time brought bigger expectations in the domain of policy toward deprived Black communities, suffering from chronic underprovision of local public goods. Despite improvements in sanitation before World War II (as documented by Troesken 2004) and increases in public expenditure on Black schools starting from the 1940s (Margo 1990), by the early 1960s the gap in the provisions of local public goods between Black and white communities remained large (Button 1989; Wright 2013). Thus, as pointed out by Button (1989, 168), “Black citizens often had high expectations that their Black representatives would improve their streets and parks quickly and measurably.” Although several case studies indicate that the election of Black officials led to an improvement in infrastructure at the local level, systematic evidence remains scant.⁴⁸ In this section, we explore whether, as a result of the special measures brought in by the VRA, county governments—to which more African Americans were elected—improved the provision of local public goods.

community must become fully conscious of its potential political power, of its growing ability to change, through concerted political action, the conditions of life in the South, and, indeed, the complexion of Congress and the major parties.”

⁴⁷ Quoted by Wright (2013, 202).

⁴⁸ For example, Button (1989) documents a positive correlation between the share of Black elected officials and the improvement in street paving and recreational facilities in six communities. For a historical overview, see Wright (2013). In a recent contribution, Hopkins and McCabe (2012) study the effect of Black mayors on fiscal and employment policies in a sample of large US cities. Using a close election regression discontinuity design, the authors show that the inauguration of Black mayors does not affect policies, with the exception of police hiring.

In the US South, county commissions play a dominant role among local governments, as they preside over a number of very important functions (Wager 1951).⁴⁹ In particular, they have the power to levy taxes and appropriate funds for expenditures on essential public services and infrastructure (such as roads, sanitation, parks and recreation, housing, urban development, and public utilities), and county governments account for more than half of the overall local spending.⁵⁰ Hence, to study the relationship between Black political empowerment and local public spending, we have collected information from the Census of Governments on current and capital spending by county governments, which is available at 5-year intervals since 1957. As shown in table A2, in 1957 real spending per capita (in 2000 US\$) is about \$30 higher in noncovered counties than in covered ones. Most of this gap—equivalent to about 10% of the average total spending in noncovered counties—is due to current spending, since the difference in capital spending is less than \$1. Interestingly, by the early 1980s, the differential in total and current spending has virtually disappeared, whereas capital spending per capita is about \$4 higher in covered than in noncovered counties. These changes may be due to a variety of factors, and our objective is to isolate the effect of Black political empowerment by investigating how the relationship between the preexisting share of African Americans in the county population and spending by local governments changed over time within covered counties. If Black empowerment had an effect, the slope of this relationship should increase after the passage of the VRA. In particular, if the extension of the franchise enables the representation of Black political interests, covered counties with larger shares of African Americans should experience an increase in spending. Additionally, if Black office holding enhances minority representation, such increase should be larger in covered counties with electoral rules favorable to the election of African Americans. In fact, civil rights activists

⁴⁹ Historically, the Southern model of local government was inspired by the so-called Virginia plan, where towns and townships were absent, and nearly all power resided in the so-called county court. Townships made their appearance in the US South when they were forced upon North Carolina and South Carolina by the carpetbaggers after the Civil War. However, as pointed out by Wager (1951), "The rural South never became accustomed to a unit of government smaller than the county." Furthermore, while some local government functions are performed by other bodies, such as special districts and school districts, their prevalence in the South is significantly lower than in the rest of the country. In fact, data from the Census of Governments indicate that in 1957, there were on average four school and special districts per county in the South compared with 25 in the rest of the country. While there is some variation in the number of these bodies across states, the South was much more homogeneous than the rest of the United States (the standard deviations are 2.9 and 16.5, respectively).

⁵⁰ For example, 56% in 1957 (the first year in our sample) and 52% in 1982 (the end of our sample period). For an overview on county expenditure functions, see Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (1971).

saw Black office holding—that is, descriptive representation—as the primary route to the advancement of minority interests,⁵¹ and a large literature has pointed out several reasons why descriptive representation enhances substantive representation.⁵² For example, Black voters are more willing to articulate their policy preferences to minority elected officials. They, in turn, are more inclined to engage in advocacy to persuade other office holders. Finally, political competition from African American candidates can increase the responsiveness of white elected officials to the Black constituency.

As pointed out before, areas with larger Black shares might have seen increases in spending even in the absence of the VRA's specific provisions. To overcome this identification problem, we implement again a differences-in-differences design where we exploit two sources of heterogeneity—coverage and preexisting electoral rules—to estimate whether covered SMD counties with larger Black shares experienced a different spending pattern from before to after the VRA. Thus, our main coefficient of interest is the triple interaction between the Black share in 1960, coverage, and the SMD indicator, which allows us to estimate the differential effect of Black political empowerment due to rules favorable to the election of minority candidates.

We begin by reporting in figure 10 the results of an event study displaying the difference over time between covered and noncovered counties in the relationship between real county spending per capita (in log) and the 1960 Black share, controlling for standard determinants of spending (unemployment, poverty, and population), state-year interactions, and county fixed effects. To identify the model, we omit the interactions with the first year of the sample, using 1957 as the reference.

As shown in the top panels, in the pre-VRA period, covered counties with larger preexisting shares of Blacks did not display a significantly different spending pattern compared with noncovered ones, and this was true for both current and capital expenditure. However, by the late 1970s, while current expenditure was still comparable in the two groups, there is evidence that capital spending began to increase at a faster rate in covered counties. In the bottom panels, still focusing on capital spending,

⁵¹ In principle, even in the absence of rules favorable to the election of Blacks, policy makers could cater to the interest of African Americans, provided that they are pivotal. However, local elections—often taking place off-cycle—typically display low turnout rates, and minority groups are not easily mobilized (Warshaw 2019). This is particularly true in the period we are considering because of widespread intimidation practices and institutionalized suppression of Black participation in party decision-making (Mickey 2015). Hence, as discussed before, court rulings protecting electoral rules favorable to minority candidates were crucial to Black political empowerment.

⁵² See Swers and Rouse (2011) for an overview.

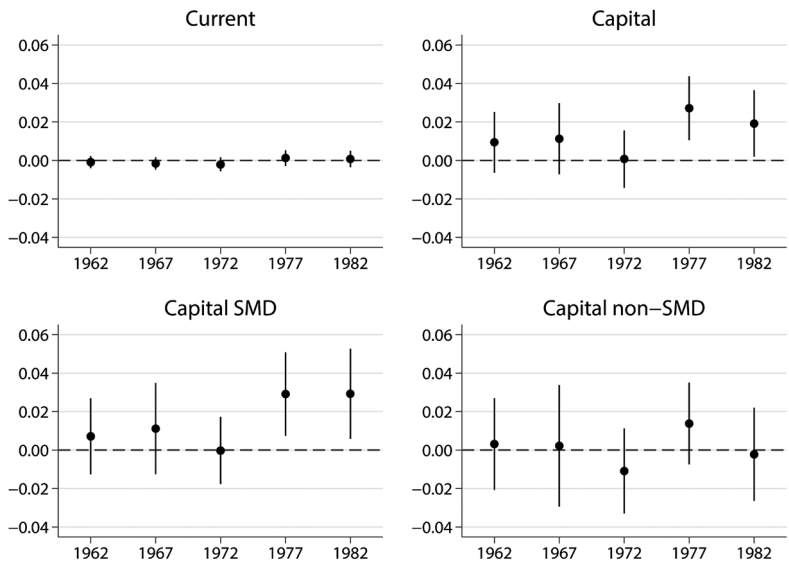


FIG. 10.—Difference in gradient of (ln) spending per capita on Black elected officials in 1960 in covered counties, by electoral system. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Robust standard errors are clustered by judicial divisions. State trends and county fixed effects are included. Controls: unemployment rate (%), 1960; families below poverty line (%), 1960; population, 1960. Omitted interaction: 1957.

we decompose the effect of coverage depending on the preexisting electoral rule. A clearer pattern emerges: the faster growth in capital spending in the post-VRA period was in fact concentrated in covered SMD counties. In other words, our event study indicates that after the passage of the VRA, covered counties with larger shares of Blacks experienced a faster growth in capital spending than those that were not covered, and this growth was concentrated in counties with preexisting electoral rules favorable to the election of Blacks.

While it seems unlikely that the patterns we document could be driven by mechanisms other than the representation of African American interests, this is still a possibility. To address this concern, we turn to the long-run analysis and estimate a quadruple interaction model using a series of alternative specifications. Table 6 presents our findings, where the dependent variable is the difference in the natural log of real spending per capita between the beginning (1957) and the end (1982) of our sample period. Our focus remains on how the size of the initial Black population affects outcomes differentially depending on coverage and preexisting electoral rules. We start by reporting in columns 1 and 2 the estimated coefficients for the overall sample when we account for additional economic

TABLE 6
OLS REGRESSIONS (Dependent Variable: Change in Local Spending, 1957–82)

	OVERALL SAMPLE		BORDER SAMPLE		PLACEBO	
	Current (1)	Capital (2)	Current (3)	Capital (4)	Current (5)	Capital (6)
Black share (%):						
1960 × coverage × SMD	−.003 (.005)	.039** (.017)	.002 (.006)	.031*** (.010)	.006 (.011)	−.001 (.020)
1960 × coverage	.002 (.004)	−.011 (.013)	.001 (.004)	−.012 (.011)	−.004 (.008)	.010 (.019)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls × coverage	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Controls × coverage × SMD	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Adjusted R^2	.791	.088	.214	.345	.870	.296
Observations	960	862	238	241	622	886

NOTE.—Robust standard errors (in parentheses) are clustered by judicial divisions in cols. 1, 2, 5, and 6 and by judicial divisions and border segments in cols. 3 and 4. State trends are included in cols. 1, 2, 5, and 6, and county pair and coverage trends are included in cols. 3 and 4. Controls in cols. 1, 2, 5, and 6: unemployment rate (%), 1960; families below poverty line (%), 1960; low skilled (%), 1960; population, 1960; urban population (%), 1960; agricultural productivity; cotton share (%), 1964; pro-Black protest, 1960–64; anti-Black protest, 1960–64; Republican share (%), 1964.

** Statistically significant at the 5% level.

*** Statistically significant at the 1% level.

and demographic characteristics.⁵³ Importantly, to rule out the possibility that the patterns we have identified might be driven by other sources of heterogeneity in covered SMD counties, we allow the impact of each control variable to vary by coverage status and preexisting electoral rule by estimating a fully interacted specification.⁵⁴ Our results confirm the absence of a differential pattern for current expenditure, whereas we continue to find that capital spending grew more rapidly within covered counties with larger Black population shares electing county governing bodies by SMD.

Even if in our fully interacted specification we control for potentially heterogeneous effects of many pre-VRA county characteristics in covered SMD counties, we are still concerned that spending could be affected by other channels at work within covered SMD counties. In particular, as local public spending responds to changes in economic and demographic characteristics, different trends in our explanatory variables—not fully captured by their 1960 level—could drive the increase in spending in this

⁵³ The full set of control variables includes 1960 county characteristics, such as unemployment rate, percent of families below poverty line, population (ln), percent urban, agricultural productivity, cotton share, pro- and anti-Black activism, and Republican share.

⁵⁴ That is, all control variables are interacted with coverage, SMD, and coverage × SMD. The estimated coefficients are available upon request.

particular group of counties.⁵⁵ To address this concern, we restrict our analysis to the border sample.⁵⁶ The corresponding estimation results (cols. 3, 4) show that our main coefficients are not affected.

Last, to rule out the possibility that our findings might just reflect a general pattern in local spending within covered SMD counties with larger shares of Blacks, in columns 5 and 6 we carry out a placebo exercise where we use spending by other local governments (municipalities, townships, special districts, and independent school districts) as the dependent variable. If the change in spending by county governments was due to a general pattern driven by other factors operating in covered SMD counties (e.g., a change in economic structure or in political participation), then we should observe an increase also in spending by other local bodies. Reassuringly, we do not find any differential effect of the initial share of Blacks on spending by other local governments within covered counties electing their county commissioners by SMD.⁵⁷

How big are the effects we have uncovered? While we do not find any effect on current spending (see col. 1), our estimates in column 2 indicate that a 10 percentage point increase in the 1960 share of Blacks in covered counties, electing commissioners by SMD, leads to an additional 3.9% increase in capital spending.⁵⁸ Given that in 1960 one-third of the population in covered counties was Black, this implies an additional 12.7% increase in capital spending over our sample period. This is a notable shift, considering that public spending—particularly on infrastructural projects—is typically characterized by significant inertia (Larcinese, Snyder, and Testa 2013).

⁵⁵ Directly accounting for changes in our explanatory variables would be problematic because of endogeneity concerns due to reverse causality; i.e., changes in spending could drive trends in county economic and demographic characteristics.

⁵⁶ As we have seen in figs. 8 and 9, the border sample is balanced on both preexisting covariates and their trends, and the same holds true if we look at coverage by election type: covered SMD counties do not display statistically significant differences in either their 1960 characteristics or their pre- and post-VRA trends (figs. A4, A5). Thus, by restricting our attention to the border sample, we are more confident that our results are not driven by other sources of heterogeneity.

⁵⁷ Since spending by other local governments is essentially determined by municipalities and school boards, we also carried out a placebo exercise on the effect of county commissions electoral rules on other Black elected officials, running the same specification of col. 1 of table 5 but using the share of Black officials in other local governments instead of county commissions as the dependent variable. The estimation results (reported in col. 4 of table A6) show that the share of other elected officials does not display any significantly different pattern within covered counties electing county commissioners by district.

⁵⁸ The absence of an aggregate effect on current spending could mask heterogeneous effects across different subcategories (e.g., welfare spending, salaries, payments for supplies and contractual services). While data limitations on local public finances do not allow us to investigate this possibility, existing work on public employment shows that the VRA affected the racial composition rather than the size of the public sector's labor force (Wright 2013; Aneja and Avenancio-Leon 2019).

How was the increase in spending financed? Local county governments raise revenues through local taxes and intergovernmental transfers.⁵⁹ While current expenditures are essentially financed by tax revenues, capital spending by local governments is most commonly financed by borrowing (US Census Bureau 2000) and, to a much more limited extent, by tax revenues. The ability to borrow to finance infrastructure spending—combined with its salience to the Black electorate—could provide a rationale for the different pattern we have uncovered comparing capital outlays and current expenditure. To shed light on this issue, in table 7 we deploy again our quadruple-differences research design to analyze the long-run changes in tax revenues. Focusing on the difference in the natural log of real revenues per capita between the beginning (1957) and the end (1982), table 7 summarizes the main patterns in intergovernmental transfers and own revenues. Our results show that covered SMD counties with larger shares of Blacks experienced an increase in intergovernmental—that is, federal and state—transfers (although this effect is less precisely estimated in the border regression) but not in own revenues. The increase in intergovernmental transfers amounts to only about one-third of the increase in capital spending, implying that about two-thirds of the increase in local expenditure is financed through debt. Since coverage was a federal intervention, it might also have altered the relative importance of federal as opposed to state transfers. In columns 3 and 6, we explore this possibility, studying patterns in the share of federal transfers, but we do not uncover any significant difference by coverage status.

To conclude, our analysis provides systematic evidence consistent with the historical accounts of an improvement in local infrastructure following Black political empowerment (Button 1989). Covered counties with electoral rules more favorable to the election of Black commissioners spent significantly more on capital projects, and this increase was financed predominantly by borrowing and, to some extent, by intergovernmental transfers. On the other hand, we do not find evidence of an increase in direct payments to individuals. These patterns of local spending are consistent with the idea that the gains achieved by Blacks did not take place at the expense of white Southerners, as in the aftermath of the VRA, the US South appears to have embraced growth-enhancing policies (Wright 2013) with limited redistribution.

VII. Conclusions

The VRA of 1965 restated the prohibition against the denial or abridgment of the right to vote on account of race contained in the Fifteenth

⁵⁹ Intergovernmental transfers amount to about 40% of county tax revenues at the beginning of our sample period and 35% at the end.

TABLE 7
OLS REGRESSIONS (Dependent Variable: Change in Revenues, 1957–82)

	OVERALL SAMPLE			BORDER SAMPLE		
	Intergovernmental Revenues (1)	County Own Revenues (2)	Federal Share (3)	Intergovernmental Revenues (4)	County Own Revenues (5)	Federal Share (6)
Black share (%):						
1960 × coverage × SMD	.0145*** (.0053)	.0016 (.0061)	.0008 (.0014)	.0124 (.0105)	-.0049 (.0072)	-.0044 (.0032)
1960 × coverage	-.0129*** (.0046)	.0004 (.0044)	.0013 (.0012)	-.0132 (.0105)	.0049 (.0070)	-.0003 (.0019)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls × coverage	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Controls × coverage × SMD	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
State trends	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
County pair trends	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Adjusted R^2	.737	.748	.843	.259	.297	.150
Observations	973	975	973	243	245	243

NOTE.—Robust standard errors (in parentheses) are clustered by judicial divisions in cols. 1–3 and by judicial divisions and border segments in cols. 4–6. State trends are included in cols. 1–3, and county pair and coverage trends are included in cols. 4–6; Controls in cols. 1–3; unemployment rate (%), 1960; families below poverty line (%), 1960; low skilled (%), 1960; population, 1960; urban population (%), 1960; agricultural productivity; cotton share (%), 1964; pro-Black protest, 1960–64; anti-Black protest, 1960–64; Republican share (%), 1964.

*** Statistically significant at the 1% level.

Amendment while passing some drastic measures to preempt its violation. Seven of the 11 former Confederate states were covered in 1965 by special provisions to prevent a reenactment of the sort of discriminatory practices that in the post-Reconstruction period *de facto* banned Blacks from elective offices. In particular, they were subject to preclearance by federal authorities of any change affecting the voting process. In this paper, we have assessed whether coverage was effective in changing the racial makeup of local governments in the US South.

Our results show that, while before 1965 Black office holding in all states of the former Confederacy was unrelated to their racial composition, in the immediate aftermath of the VRA, Black representation increased more in counties with larger shares of African Americans, and the gradient of the relationship was clearly steeper for covered counties. We also find that preexisting electoral rules played an important role. In particular, coverage led to larger gains in Black office holding in states that elected county commissioners by SMD, a system more favorable to the election of minority candidates. As court battles over the enforcement of the VRA's special provisions were instrumental to preserving preexisting district-type elections, preclearance provided an effective tool to promote the journey toward Black office holding in important bodies like county commissions, responsible for the provision of local public goods. As a result, capital spending grew more rapidly within counties electing Black commissioners.

In less than two decades, the VRA significantly changed the racial makeup of local governments in the US South. Our analysis has touched upon one of the possible consequences, namely, the change in local spending, but several additional avenues for research appear worth exploring. First, the increase in capital spending we have documented might have long-term consequences on local development (e.g., educational attainment, employment, and health outcomes). Second, the administration of justice was and continues to be highly salient for African Americans. Hence, an interesting question is whether and how the VRA affected minority arrest and incarceration rates.⁶⁰ Third, as racial perceptions and role models for minorities may affect their economic outcomes, an interesting question is whether the emergence of Black elected officials has improved economic outcomes of African Americans via those channels. Last, as racial attitudes affect political behavior (Kuziemko and Washington 2018), another relevant issue is whether Black office holding has changed the way in which Southern whites cast their ballot leading to a polarization along racial lines. We leave these questions to further research.

⁶⁰ In a recent paper, Facchini, Knight, and Testa (2020) study the effect of Black enfranchisement on police treatment of minorities.

Data Availability

Code replicating the tables and figures in this article can be found in the Harvard Dataverse (<https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/RC7OVD>; Bernini, Facchini, and Testa 2022).

Appendix

A. Figures and Tables

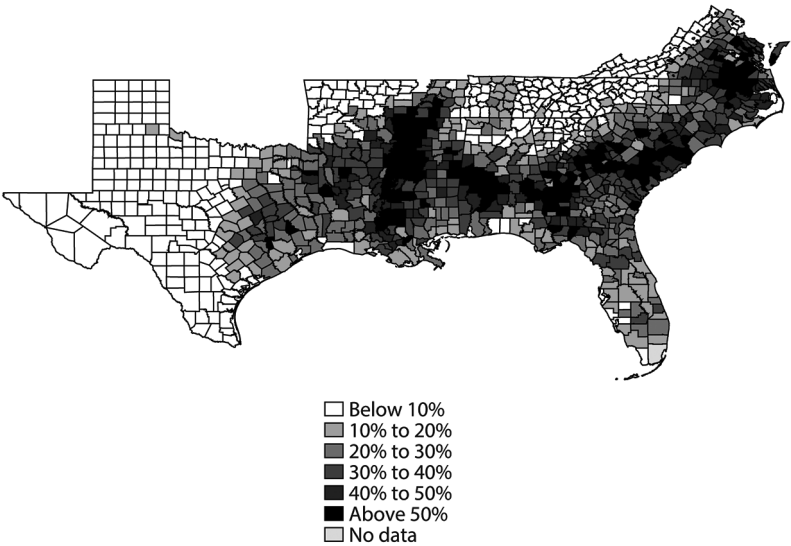


FIG. A1.—Percent Black, 1960.

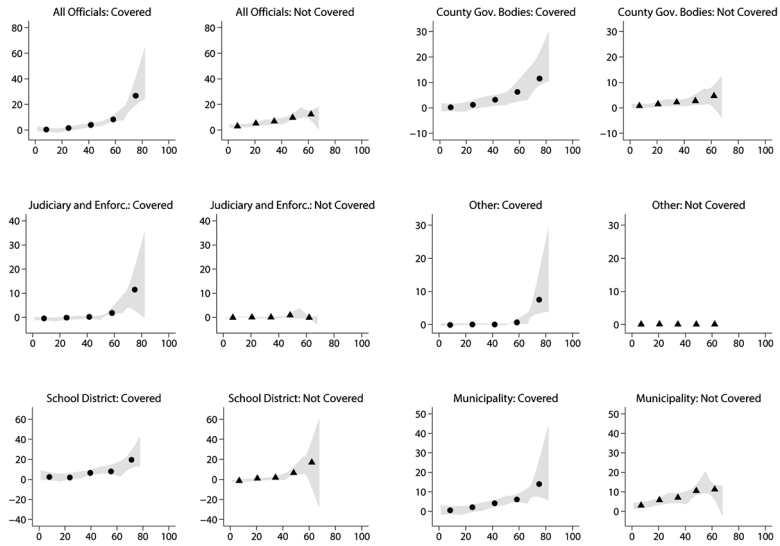


FIG. A2.—Linearity. The figure shows bin scatterplots with 95% confidence intervals.

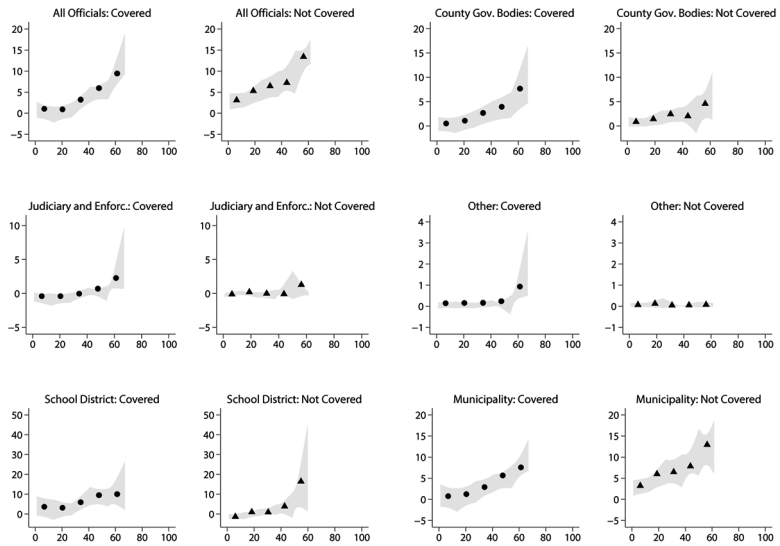


FIG. A3.—Linearity: common support. The figure shows bin scatterplots with 95% confidence intervals.

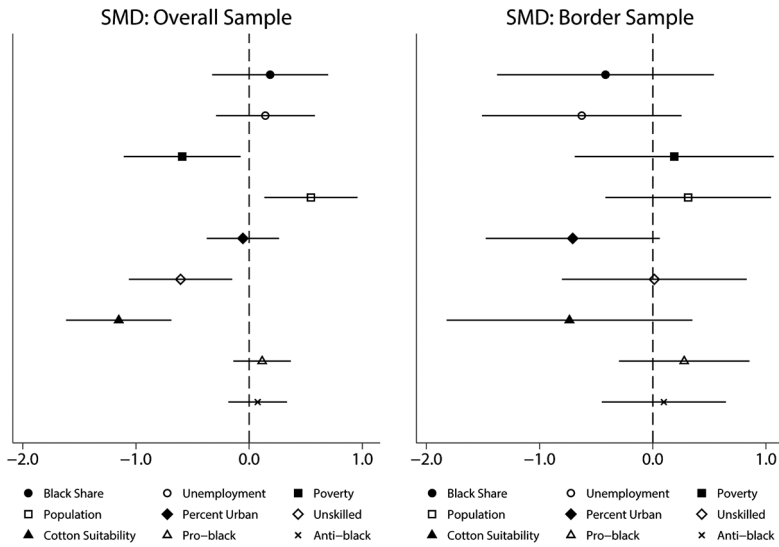


FIG. A4.—Balance in covariates values, SMD. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Robust standard errors are clustered by judicial divisions in the overall sample and by judicial divisions and border segments in the border sample. Estimated coefficients are obtained by regressing each variable on the coverage indicator, the SMD indicator, and their interaction. County pair fixed effects are included in the border specification.

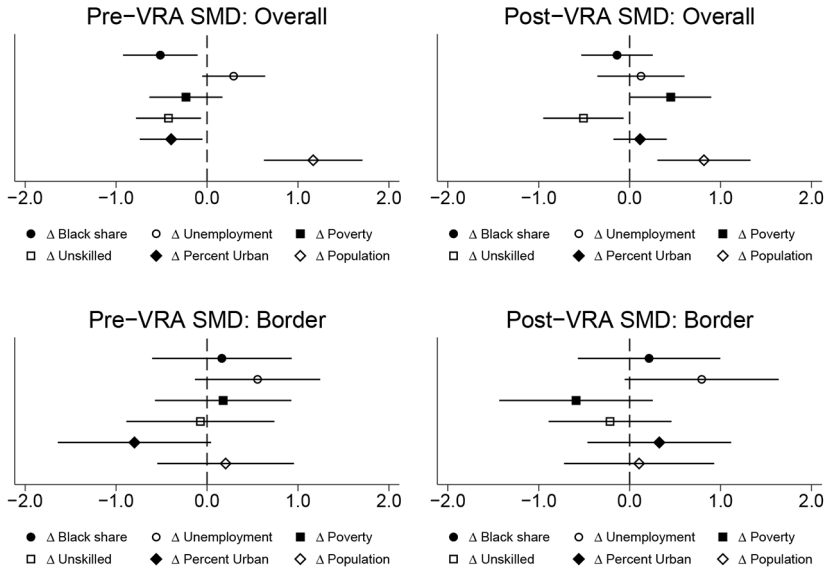


FIG. A5.—Balance in covariates trends, SMD. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Robust standard errors are clustered by judicial divisions in the overall sample and by judicial divisions and border segments in the border sample. Estimated coefficients are obtained by regressing each variable on the coverage indicator, the SMD indicator, and their interaction. County pair fixed effects are included in the border specifications.

TABLE A1
SUMMARY STATISTICS

	COVERED		NOT COVERED	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
A. Local Black Elected Officials				
All local officials:				
1964	.11	1.06	.04	.38
1980	5.22	8.62	1.55	3.49
Municipality:				
1964	.18	1.63	.05	.47
1980	5.21	8.96	1.86	4.68
School board:				
1964	.00	.00	.07	1.00
1980	5.42	10.71	1.40	5.31
County governments:				
1964	.04	1.04	.00	.12
1980	3.64	9.64	.63	2.15
County governing body:				
1964	.00	.00	.00	.00
1980	2.18	5.19	.47	1.81
Judiciary and law enforcement:				
1964	.03	.69	.00	.12
1980	1.10	4.40	.15	.95
Other administrative body:				
1964	.01	.35	.00	.00
1980	.35	2.32	.01	.21
B. County Characteristics				
Black share, 1960	32.50	19.98	13.18	14.07
Population, 1960 (1,000s)	34.72	57.77	40.88	101.86
Unemployment rate, 1960	4.96	1.94	4.87	2.16
Urban population, 1960	28.18	29.01	32.95	28.15
Families below poverty line, 1960	46.17	16.19	43.67	14.94
Low skilled, 1960	73.86	8.68	70.74	9.60
Agricultural productivity	.26	.23	.59	.44
Cotton share, 1964	2.11	3.44	2.61	5.45
Anti-Black protest, 1960–64	.30	2.04	.05	.49
Pro-Black protest, 1960–64	1.09	5.67	.54	3.19
Republican share for president, 1964	61.93	23.81	39.35	12.54
Counties	511		537	

NOTE.—Data are percentages unless indicated otherwise.

TABLE A2
SUMMARY STATISTICS

	COVERED		NOT COVERED	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
A. Local Expenditure per Capita (Real 2000 US\$)				
Total expenditure:				
1957	243.72	158.77	272.62	195.97
1982	582.13	421.90	581.58	611.90
Current expenditure:				
1957	196.55	123.21	226.95	157.42
1982	527.90	391.84	528.25	568.20
Capital expenditure:				
1957	49.48	59.44	50.26	62.38
1982	58.54	79.51	54.61	68.96
B. ln Local Expenditure per Capita (Real 2000 US\$)				
ln total expenditure:				
1957	5.31	.62	5.39	.66
1982	6.12	.71	6.04	.82
ln current expenditure:				
1957	5.09	.63	5.21	.65
1982	6.01	.73	5.93	.84
ln capital expenditure:				
1957	3.25	1.31	3.31	1.22
1982	3.39	1.26	3.40	1.20

TABLE A3
OLS MODELS: COMMON SUPPORT AND POPULATION WEIGHTING (Dependent Variable:
Change in Black Elected Officials, 1964–80)

	COUNTY GOVERNMENTS			OTHER GOVERNMENTS	
	Commission (1)	Judiciary and Enforcement (2)	Other (3)	Municipality (4)	School District (5)
A. Common Support					
Black share (%):					
1960 × coverage	.063** (.028)	.035*** (.013)	.011*** (.004)	-.018 (.033)	-.018 (.063)
1960	.049*** (.010)	.009 (.006)	-.000 (.000)	.141*** (.021)	.179*** (.050)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls × coverage	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Adjusted R^2	.395	.224	.066	.416	.419
Observations	993	993	993	960	821
B. Population Weighted					
Black share (%):					
1960 × coverage	.091*** (.029)	.077*** (.021)	.046*** (.015)	.025 (.040)	.022 (.065)
1960	.048*** (.010)	.008* (.005)	-.000 (.000)	.138*** (.021)	.175*** (.049)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls × coverage	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Adjusted R^2	.415	.255	.121	.418	.434
Observations	1,009	1,009	1,009	979	831

NOTE.—Robust standard errors (in parentheses) are clustered by judicial divisions. State trends are included. Controls: unemployment rate (%), 1960; families below poverty line (%), 1960; low skilled (%), 1960; population, 1960; urban population (%), 1960; agricultural productivity; cotton share (%), 1964; pro-Black protest, 1960–64; anti-Black protest, 1960–64; Republican share (%), 1964.

* Statistically significant at the 10% level.

** Statistically significant at the 5% level.

*** Statistically significant at the 1% level.

TABLE A4
OLS MODELS (Dependent Variable: Change in Black Elected Officials for Different Periods)

	WITHOUT COVERAGE \times CONTROLS					WITH COVERAGE \times CONTROLS				
	Commission (1)	Judiciary (2)	Other (3)	Municipality (4)	School District (5)	Commission (6)	Judiciary (7)	Other (8)	Municipality (9)	School District (10)
	A. Benchmark (1964–80)									
Black share (%), 1960 \times coverage	.081*** (.030)	.078*** (.020)	.042*** (.014)	.022 (.035)	.037 (.066)	.092*** (.030)	.078*** (.021)	.047*** (.015)	.015 (.040)	.021 (.066)
Adjusted R^2	.408	.236	.122	.389	.415	.409	.244	.123	.407	.425
Observations	1,009	1,009	1,009	979	831	1,009	1,009	1,009	979	831
	B. 1964–76									
Black share (%), 1960 \times coverage	.068** (.027)	.068*** (.017)	.026*** (.009)	-.036 (.028)	.008 (.043)	.087*** (.028)	.076*** (.020)	.028*** (.009)	-.054* (.030)	.001 (.042)
Adjusted R^2	.307	.194	.088	.292	.379	.317	.200	.085	.311	.391
Observations	1,009	1,009	1,009	979	831	1,009	1,009	1,009	979	831

TABLE A4 (Continued)

	WITHOUT COVERAGE × CONTROLS				WITH COVERAGE × CONTROLS				
	Commission (1)	Judiciary (2)	Other (3)	Municipality (4)	School District (5)	Commission (6)	Judiciary (7)	Other (8)	School District (10)
C. 1964–78									
Black share (%), 1960 × coverage	.080*** (.028)	.066*** (.017)	.030*** (.009)	-.011 (.029)	.041 (.047)	.098*** (.029)	.070*** (.020)	.033*** (.010)	-.022 (.033)
Adjusted R^2	.345	.190	.101	.367	.414	.351	.198	.098	.401
Observations	1,009	1,009	1,009	979	831	1,009	1,009	1,009	979
D. 1964–Average 1978–80									
Black share (%), 1960 × coverage	.083*** (.029)	.071*** (.018)	.036*** (.011)	.012 (.031)	.035 (.054)	.096*** (.029)	.074*** (.020)	.040*** (.012)	.001 (.035)
Adjusted R^2	.400	.217	.123	.390	.436	.404	.225	.122	.419
Observations	1,009	1,009	1,009	979	831	1,009	1,009	1,009	979
E. 1964–90									
Black share (%), 1960 × coverage	.118*** (.031)	.081*** (.020)	.057*** (.013)	.103** (.042)	.209** (.092)	.118*** (.034)	.092*** (.022)	.059*** (.014)	.082 (.050)
Adjusted R^2	.538	.341	.259	.587	.566	.549	.358	.272	.600
Observations	1,009	1,009	1,009	979	831	1,009	1,009	1,009	979

NOTE.—Robust standard errors (in parentheses) are clustered by judicial divisions. State trends are included. Controls: unemployment rate (%), 1960; families below poverty line (%), 1960; low skilled (%), 1960; population, 1960; urban population (%), 1960; agricultural productivity; cotton share (%), 1964; pro-Black protest, 1960–64; anti-Black protest, 1960–64; Republican share (%), 1964.

* Statistically significant at the 10% level.

** Statistically significant at the 5% level.

*** Statistically significant at the 1% level.

TABLE A5
OLS MODELS (Dependent Variable: Change in Black Elected Officials, 1964–80)

	COUNTY GOVERNMENTS			OTHER GOVERNMENTS	
	Commission (1)	Judiciary and Enforcement (2)	Other (3)	Municipality (4)	School District (5)
A. Republican Share Control					
Black share (%):					
1960 × coverage	.071** (.034)	.078* (.043)	.017* (.009)	.036 (.083)	.092 (.101)
1960	.018 (.044)	.011 (.023)	−.003 (.007)	.230** (.106)	.146 (.147)
Adjusted R^2	.480	.515	.475	.589	.537
Observations	250	250	250	245	222
B. Without Border Weights					
Black share (%):					
1960 × coverage	.088** (.040)	.077* (.040)	.015* (.009)	.050 (.059)	.105 (.093)
1960	.014 (.042)	.013 (.023)	−.003 (.005)	.209** (.096)	.131 (.130)
Adjusted R^2	.300	.549	.441	.506	.499
Observations	250	250	250	245	222

NOTE.—Robust standard errors (in parentheses) are clustered by judicial divisions and border segments. County pair and coverage trends are included.

* Statistically significant at the 10% level.

** Statistically significant at the 5% level.

TABLE A6
OLS MODELS (Dependent Variable: Change in Black Elected Officials
by County Commission Election Rule)

	COUNTY COMMISSION			MUNICIPALITY AND SCHOOL DISTRICT (4)
	Population Weighted (1)	Common Support (2)	Border Sample (3)	
Black share (%):				
1960 × coverage × SMD	.116** (.054)	.147*** (.050)	.089* (.047)	.061 (.100)
1960 × coverage	.030 (.038)	−.013 (.030)	.016 (.023)	.046 (.074)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls × coverage	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Adjusted R^2	.435	.433	.512	.462
Observations	1,009	993	250	870

NOTE.—Robust standard errors (in parentheses) are clustered by judicial divisions in cols. 1, 2, and 4 and by judicial divisions and border segments in col. 3. State trends are included in cols. 1, 2, and 4, and county pair and coverage trends are included in col. 3. Controls in cols. 1, 2, and 4: unemployment rate (%), 1960; families below poverty line (%), 1960; low skilled (%), 1960; population, 1960; urban population (%), 1960; agricultural productivity; cotton share (%), 1964; pro-Black protest, 1960–64; anti-Black protest, 1960–64; Republican share (%), 1964.

* Statistically significant at the 10% level.

** Statistically significant at the 5% level.

*** Statistically significant at the 1% level.

TABLE A7
OLS MODELS (Dependent Variable: Change in Black Elected Officials, 1964–80)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Black share (%):					
1960 × coverage	.042* (.022)	.092** (.042)	.106** (.042)	.103** (.045)	.103*** (.036)
1960	.126*** (.013)	.135*** (.017)	.131*** (.016)	.136*** (.017)	.136*** (.016)
Unemployment rate (%), 1960		.129 (.086)	.133 (.085)	.052 (.060)	.052 (.064)
Families below poverty line (%), 1960		.023 (.024)	.017 (.024)	.022 (.016)	.022 (.017)
Population, 1960		.326 (.242)	.089 (.245)	.114 (.197)	.114 (.172)
Low skilled (%), 1960		-.116*** (.040)	-.105** (.042)	-.102*** (.033)	-.102*** (.036)
Urban population (%), 1960		.014 (.012)	.013 (.012)	.002 (.007)	.002 (.007)
Agricultural productivity		.198 (.766)	.189 (.701)	-.180 (.427)	-.180 (.408)
Cotton share (%), 1964		-.022 (.030)	-.015 (.031)	-.008 (.015)	-.008 (.016)
Pro-Black protest, 1960–64			.217*** (.053)	.169 (.189)	.169 (.157)
Anti-Black protest, 1960–64			-.262 (.226)	-.752 (.660)	-.752 (.593)
Republican share for president (%), 1964			-.059*** (.020)	-.029** (.013)	-.029*** (.011)
Unemployment rate (%), 1960 × coverage				.201 (.197)	.201 (.189)
Families below poverty line (%), 1960 × coverage				.014 (.060)	.014 (.051)
Population, 1960 × coverage				.240 (.790)	.240 (.730)
Low skilled (%), 1960 × coverage				-.003 (.089)	-.003 (.090)
Urban population (%), 1960 × coverage				.029 (.029)	.029 (.031)
Agricultural productivity × coverage				1.576 (2.181)	1.576 (1.735)
Cotton share (%), 1964 × coverage				-.016 (.137)	-.016 (.144)
Pro-Black protest, 1960–64 × coverage				.045 (.198)	.045 (.164)
Anti-Black protest, 1960–64 × coverage				.464 (.703)	.464 (.639)
Republican share for president (%), 1964 × coverage				-.060 (.042)	-.060* (.032)
State trends	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Adjusted R ²	.437	.498	.515	.516	.516
Observations	1,048	971	971	971	971

NOTE.—Robust standard errors (in parentheses) are clustered by judicial divisions in cols. 1–4 and by county in col. 5.

* Statistically significant at the 10% level.

** Statistically significant at the 5% level.

*** Statistically significant at the 1% level.

B. *Variable Definitions and Sources*

B1. Black Elected Officials

Share of Black elected officials by type of office.—Number of Black elected officials in county governments, municipalities, and school boards, as reported by the NRBE0, divided by the total number of elected officials for the corresponding offices at the county level, as reported by the Census of Governments. Note that the NRBE0 does not report information on school boards' members in Virginia, where school systems are considered agencies of city and county governments and are administered by appointed boards. When the numerator is zero and the denominator is missing, the share is zero. The total number of Black elected officials in each local office in the US South has been obtained by counting the Black elected officials by office reported in the NRBE0 in 1969, 1971, and the period 1973–90. These officials have been matched to the counties using the address provided by the roster. For the denominator, we use data from the Census of Governments for 1957, 1967, 1977, and 1987 reporting the total number of elected officials for county governments (commission, judiciary and enforcement, and other offices), municipalities, and school districts, aggregated at the county level. For the period 1962–64, we use the number of elective officials reported by the Census of Governments, volume 2, Compendium of Public Employment, number 2, Governmental Employment, 1957. For the period 1965–72, the total number of elective officials by type of office are taken from the Census of Governments, volume 1, Governmental Organization, number 2, Popularly Elected Officials, 1967. The Census of Governments reports the number of elective positions for all municipalities and school boards only from 1967 onward; hence, for these two categories, we use the 1967 source for all the years up to 1972. For the period 1973–82, elected officials by type of office are taken from the Census of Governments, volume 1, Governmental Organization, number 2, Popularly Elected Officials, 1977. For the period 1983–90, elected officials by type of office are taken from the Census of Governments, volume 1, Governmental Organization, number 2, Popularly Elected Officials, 1987.

B2. Local Public Finances: Expenditures

Real (2000 US\$) county government expenditure per capita.—Expenditure figures (current and capital) have been digitized from the Census of Governments series, Finances of County Governments for 1957, 1962, 1967, 1972, 1977, and 1982. The data on county government expenditure relate only to county governments and their dependent agencies and do not include amounts for other local governments within or among county areas. All real per capita figures have been obtained by dividing the nominal figures by the county population and converting them to 2000 US\$, using the consumer price index (CPI). *Capital expenditure* consists of direct expenditure for contracts or force account construction of buildings, roads, and other improvements; purchase of equipment, land, and existing structures; and payments on capital leases. It includes amounts for additions, replacements, and major alterations to fixed works and structures. *Current expenditure* consists of all expenditures with the exception of capital outlay. It includes

assistance and subsidies, interest on debt, insurance benefits and repayments, and current operations. The latter consists of direct expenditure for compensation of own officers and employees and for supplies, materials, operating leases, and contractual services except amounts for capital outlay. Expenditure on public welfare belongs to current expenditures and consists of payments for support of and assistance to needy persons contingent upon their need.

Real (2000 US\$) expenditure per capita for local governments other than county governments.—Expenditure figures (current and capital) for local government other than county governments have been obtained by subtracting county government expenditures from county areas expenditures. The latter consist of all county-level expenditures by local governments (counties, municipalities, townships, special districts, and independent school districts) and their dependent agencies and do not include amounts spent directly by the state and federal governments. County areas expenditures have been obtained from the Census of Governments Historical Database, available at 5-year intervals starting from 1957 (<ftp://ftp2.census.gov/pub/outgoing/govs/special60>). The data for expenditure figures (current and capital) reported in the County Areas Finances section, Expenditures A, are available for 1957, 1972, 1977, and 1982. All real per capita figures have been obtained by dividing the nominal figures by the county population and converting them to 2000 US\$, using the CPI index.

B3. Local Public Finances: Revenues

Real (2000 US\$) county government revenues per capita by source.—Own revenues and intergovernmental revenues have been obtained from the Census of Governments Historical Database (<ftp://ftp2.census.gov/pub/outgoing/govs/special60>) at 5-year intervals, starting from 1957. For own revenues, we use the variable on total revenue own sources reported in the County Government Finances section, Expenditures, Revenues, in 1957 and 1982. Intergovernmental revenues are the sum of total state intergovernmental revenues and total federal revenues reported in the County Government Finances section, Expenditures, Revenues, in 1957 and 1982. All real per capita figures have been obtained dividing the nominal figures by the county population and converting them to 2000 US\$, using the CPI index.

B4. Coverage

Dummy variable equal to 1 for the counties that were covered by Section 5 of the VRA in 1965 and zero otherwise. All counties of six states (Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Virginia) were covered, whereas only 39 of the 100 counties of North Carolina were covered. Arkansas, Florida, Tennessee, and Texas were not covered. The North Carolina counties covered in 1965 are as follows: Anson, Beaufort, Bertie, Bladen, Camden, Caswell, Chowan, Cleveland, Craven, Cumberland, Edgecombe, Franklin, Gaston, Gates, Granville, Greene, Guilford, Halifax, Harnett, Hertford, Hoke, Jackson, Lee, Martin, Nash, Northampton, Onslow, Pasquotank, Perquimans, Person, Pitt, Robeson, Rockingham, Scotland, Union, Vance, Washington, Wayne, Wilson. Source: <https://www.justice.gov/crt>.

B5. County Characteristics

Percent Black, 1960: percent Black in the 1960 county population is from the County and City Data Book Consolidated File, County Data 1947–77 (US Department of Commerce 1978).

Population, 1960: the county population is from the County and City Data Book Consolidated File, County Data 1947–77 (US Department of Commerce 1978).

Unemployment rate, 1960: county unemployment rate is from the County and City Data Book Consolidated File, County Data 1947–77 (US Department of Commerce 1978).

Percent of families below poverty line, 1960: percentage of families with income less than US\$3,000 in 1960 is from the County and City Data Book Consolidated File, County Data 1947–77 (US Department of Commerce 1978).

Percent unskilled, 1960: percentage of individuals age 25 or older without a high school diploma in 1960 is from the County and City Data Book Consolidated File, County Data 1947–77 (US Department of Commerce 1978).

Percent urban, 1960: percentage of urban population in 1960 is from the County and City Data Book Consolidated File, County Data 1947–77 (US Department of Commerce 1978).

Cotton share: share of farmland devoted to cotton production in 1964 and 1945 is from the US Agriculture Data, 1840–2012, Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) 35206.

Pro-Black protest, 1960–64: counts of pro-Black events that occurred between 1960 and 1964, as reported by the Dynamics of Collective Action Dataset by states and cities, matched to counties by the authors. Source: web.stanford.edu/group/collectiveaction/cgi-bin/drupal.

Anti-Black protest, 1960–64: counts of anti-Black events that occurred between 1960 and 1964, as reported by the Dynamics of Collective Action Dataset by states and cities, matched to counties by the authors. Source: web.stanford.edu/group/collectiveaction/cgi-bin/drupal.

NAACP: change in the counts of local branches of the NAACP standardized by Black population between 1942 and 1964. The information on the location of local branches of the NAACP has been obtained from the University of Washington's project "Mapping American Social Movements through the 20th Century," which reports the municipality of each branch. These locations have been mapped to the corresponding counties by the authors.

KKK: change in the counts of KKK organizations (known as Klaverns) standardized by white population. Information on the location of Klan organizations has been obtained from two sources. For the initial period, the information on the location of each Klavern has been obtained from the Virginia Commonwealth University's project "Mapping the Second Ku Klux Klan," which lists the exact location of each headquarters (in a latitude and longitude format) between 1915 and 1940, mapped to the counties by the authors. For the later period, the location by county has been obtained from "The Present-Day Ku Klux Klan Movement: Report by the Committee on Un-American Activities," House of Representatives, Ninetieth Congress, First Session, 1967 (145–63), which reports information on active Klaverns between 1964 and 1966.

Lynching: change in the number of Black lynchings standardized by Black population. The number of lynchings for the initial period (1930–40) and final period (1950–64) have been hand digitized from R. J. Ramey, *Monroe Work Today Dataset Compilation* (ver. 1), October 23, 2017. Archives, Tuskegee University, Tuskegee, Alabama (<http://archive.tuskegee.edu>).

Presidential turnout: difference in the natural log of presidential turnout, where the latter is given by the votes cast in presidential elections divided by population of voting age. The data on votes cast in the presidential election are from the General Election Data for the United States, 1950–1990, ICPSR 13. The data on population of voting age are from the Minnesota Population Center, National Historical Geographic Information System.

Governor turnout: difference in the natural log of governor turnout, defined as the ratio between votes cast in gubernatorial elections taking place in 1960 (or first date of off-cycle election after 1940) and 1940 (or first date of off-cycle election after 1960) and voting age population. The data on votes cast in gubernatorial elections are from the US Historical Election Returns, 1824–1968 (ICPSR 1). The data on population of voting age are from the Minnesota Population Center, National Historical Geographic Information System.

Goldwater: difference in the natural log of vote shares for the Republican candidates in the 1952 and 1964 presidential elections. The shares of votes for the Republican candidates are from the General Election Data for the United States, 1950–1990, ICPSR 13.

Percent Republican: difference in the natural log of vote shares for the Republican candidates in the 1964 and 1940 presidential elections. Sources: General Election Data for the United States, 1950–1990, ICPSR 13; and Electoral Data for Counties in the United States: Presidential and Congressional Races, 1840–1972, ICPSR 8611.

State House: change in number of seats per person in the county, divided by that same figure for the state overall, between 1960 and 1950. The data on legislative seats per capita have been digitized from David and Eisenberg (1961).

State Senate: change in number of seats per person in the county, divided by that same figure for the state overall, between 1960 and 1950. The data on legislative seats per capita have been digitized from David and Eisenberg (1961).

Agricultural productivity: maximum potential cotton yield by county (i.e., cotton suitability index). Source: Hornbeck and Naidu (2014).

School and special districts (number). Source: 1967 Census of Governments, vol. 1, table 3.

B6. County Governing Bodies Elections

B6.1. Incumbency. To construct a measure of incumbency in county governing bodies, we hand digitized the names of elected members in office between 1955 and 1980. We used information between adjacent elections to construct an incumbency indicator and then computed the share of commissioners in a given county that have been reelected into office for the relevant term. Information on electoral cycles (e.g., 2 years, 4 years, staggered) comes from the 1957 Census of Governments and

the state-specific sources listed below, which also report the names of the elected officials. Alabama: Alabama Official and Statistical Register. Arkansas: Certified Election Returns of Arkansas Precincts and Counties, Arkansas State Archives, Little Rock, Arkansas. In particular, we have used microfilms from the Arkansas Elected Justices of the Peace Returns. Florida: until 1962, Biennial Report of the Secretary of State of the State of Florida; after 1962, Sheriff's Star: Special Yearbook Edition. Official Publication of the Florida Sheriffs Association. Georgia: Georgia Official and Statistical Register. Louisiana: Louisiana Roster of Officials. Mississippi: Mississippi Official and Statistical Register. North Carolina: North Carolina Manual. South Carolina: until 1973, South Carolina Governmental Guide; after 1973, South Carolina Directory of County Officials. Texas: Texas Almanac. Virginia: Report of the Secretary of the Commonwealth to the Governor and General Assembly of Virginia.

- B6.2. Electoral Rules.* The information on the system of elections of members of county governing bodies comes from the Census of Governments, Elective Offices of State and Local Governments (1957), and from the NRBE (1980). In Louisiana, the county governing body is called police jury. In Mississippi and in Virginia, members of the county governing body are called supervisors. In Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina, members of county governing bodies are called commissioners. We have used the summary information reported by the Census of Governments (1957) and the NRBE (1980) at the state level to construct indicators for the system of elections of county governing bodies, as detailed below.

SMD: indicator equal to 1 for covered states where members of county governing bodies are elected by SMD (Louisiana, Mississippi, and Virginia) and zero otherwise.

Mixed: indicator equal to 1 for covered states where members of county governing bodies are elected with a combination of SMD and at-large systems (Alabama, North Carolina, and South Carolina) and zero otherwise.

At large: indicator equal to 1 for covered states where members of county governing bodies are elected at large (Georgia) and zero otherwise.

Switch: indicator equal to 1 for covered states that, by 1980, had transitioned toward elections by SMD. To code a state as a switcher, we have used the information on the system of elections from the Census of Governments, Elective Offices of State and Local Governments (1957), and the NRBE (1980) and supplemented it with information on legal challenges to elections at large of county governing bodies reported by Davidson and Grofman (1994).

- B6.3. Judicial Divisions.* The information on judicial districts and their corresponding divisions has been obtained from the official sources reported below and mapped to counties by the authors. Alabama: the US Attorney's Office (Northern District and Middle District) and the US District Court (Southern District). Arkansas: the US Attorney's

Office (Eastern District) and the US District Court (Western District). Florida: the US Attorney's Office (Northern District and Middle District) and the US District Court (Southern District). Georgia: the US Attorney's Office (Southern District) and the US District Court (Northern District and Middle District). Louisiana: the US Attorney's Office (Western District) and the US District Court (Middle District and Eastern District). Mississippi: the US District Court (Northern District and Southern District). North Carolina: the US District Court (Western District, Middle District, and Eastern District). South Carolina: the US District Court. Tennessee: the US Attorney's Office (Middle District) and the US District Court (Western District and Eastern District). Texas: the US Attorney's Office (Western District, Northern District, and Eastern District) and the US District Court (Southern District). Virginia: the US District Court (Western District and Eastern District).

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