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**RACE, REPRESENTATION AND LOCAL
GOVERNMENTS IN THE US SOUTH: THE
EFFECT OF THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT**

Giovanni Facchini, Andrea Bernini and Cecilia Testa

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JEL Classification: D72, H7, J15, N92

Keywords: Minority Rights, Enfranchisement, Local Elections, Identity Politics, Public Good Provision

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

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July 24, 2019

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“Give us the ballot, and we will fill our legislative halls with men of goodwill” (Martin Luther King, Jr., 1957)

1 Introduction

Universal suffrage is a defining feature of modern representative democracies. Yet, the right to vote is often not sufficient to guarantee representation of minorities and traditionally disadvantaged groups. Under the predicament that the identity of elected office holders substantially contributes to shape policies, provide role models, and weaken stereotypes, many countries have resorted to strong remedial measures known as ‘political reservation’, such as gender quotas or reserved seats for minorities.¹ In no other country perhaps more than in the United States, the issue of minority discrimination in the political sphere has been so central. Yet, the United States has pursued a much less prescriptive approach than mandated representation, relying instead on courts to enforce the anti-discriminatory provisions embedded in the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The purpose of this paper is to study whether such arguably less intrusive measures have been effective in advancing descriptive and substantive representation of African Americans.

Defined by President Lyndon 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 states with a history of black disenfranchisement. The elimination of literacy test provisions led to an immediate, sharp increase in black voters’ registration and turnout rates, making them a political force to be reckoned with (Casacio and Washington 2014, Donohue and Heckman 1991, Wright 2013). Yet, whether this fast progress in political participation was paralleled by gains in black representation has been questioned, as powerful obstacles to the election of African Americans remained in place.² Unlike mandated representation measures used elsewhere, the VRA only provided

¹Gender quotas are present in more than one hundred countries (Besley, Folke, Persson, and Rickne 2017) and reserved seats for minorities in more than thirty (Krook and O’Brien 2010). For evidence on their effects on policy making see Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) and Pande (2005).

²Despite the special measures introduced by the VRA, a prevailing culture of white supremacy and intimidation discouraged blacks from running for office (Andrews 1997). Moreover, in the presence of racially

a legal framework to tackle discrimination in courts. Thus, while the expectation was that eventually it would “lead to Negro state representatives, county commissioners, sheriffs, city councilmen, police chiefs and even mayors,”³ the civil right movement leadership was clearly aware that the road toward black office holding was paved with obstacles.⁴ Did the VRA live up to its promise?

While race remains one of the most debated issues in American politics, we still have limited evidence on *whether*, *when* and *how* did the arguably most important piece of civil rights legislation enacted by US Congress led to gains in black office holding. In this paper we make progress on this important question by carrying out the first systematic assessment of the VRA’s impact on the racial make-up of all *local* governments in the US South between 1962 and 1980. We provide causal 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.

To carry out our analysis, we assembled a novel dataset on local black elected officials in the eleven states of the former Confederacy, digitizing information from the National Roster of Black Elected Officials on African Americans serving on county governments, municipal governing bodies and school district boards between 1962 and 1980. To identify the effect of the VRA on the election of black officials, we exploit the fact that the special measures introduced by the VRA in 1965 (coverage) only applied to a group of Southern states,⁵ and

polarized voting, majoritarian electoral rules made it difficult to elect minority candidates. Hence, gains in black office holding at the federal and state level have been linked to the increase in “minority-majority” districts, which took place more than 20 years after the passage of the VRA Handley and Grofman 1994. Finally, even when blacks were a majority of the electorate, like in several local elections, their chances of winning office were hampered by a white political class ready to use black vote dilution tactics, e.g. switches from single member districts to election at-large (Trebbi, Aghion, and Alesina 2008), substitution of elective with appointive offices, and discriminatory qualifications for black candidates to prevent their empowerment (Parker 1990).

³Martin Luther King, Jr., Summary of the 3rd Annual Convention, Southern Christian Leadership Conference. August 9-13, 1965, Birmingham, Alabama.

⁴The VRA was met by the fierce resistance of Southern white segregationists. Hence, since its inception, it was clear that enforcement by courts would be essential. In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1965, “*To become a major turning point in American life, extensive and dynamic enforcement by the Justice Department is indispensable.*”

⁵Jurisdictions that imposed a test or device restricting the right to vote and experienced a turnout lower than 50 percent in the previous presidential election were covered under Section 5 of the Act. As a result, they were subject to pre-clearance by federal authorities of any change affecting the voting process. Six

also that their potential impact was greater in areas with larger black population shares, because candidates’ race was highly salient. In particular, we use non-covered counties in the former Confederacy – with a similar history of slavery and black disenfranchisement – to form a comparison group. We thus estimate whether covered counties with a larger pre-existing black population (treatment group) – that in the pre-VRA period did not exhibit any substantial difference in black representation compared to those in the control group – experienced a larger increase in black office holding, from before to after the VRA, when compared to counties that were not covered. One concern in our triple-differences research design is that the share of African Americans in the population was on average larger in covered than in non-covered counties. This imbalance poses two potential threats to identification. First, the difference between treatment and control group could be problematic if the effect of the pre-existing 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 pre-treatment variables reduces both bias and heterogeneity (Rosenbaum 2005), we address these concerns by deploying a geographic discontinuity research design (GDR), 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 increase in representation was essentially driven by the election of blacks to county governments (e.g. county commissions and enforcement bodies). In particular, counties with larger black population shares in the treatment group experienced an increase in the share of African American commissioners twice as large as that in the control group. These results also hold when we deploy the GDR design. Thus, contrary to anecdotal evidence suggesting that blacks were only elected to minor offices,⁶ we find that coverage significantly increased black representation

States (Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Virginia) were fully covered and one (North Carolina) was partially covered. All covered jurisdictions were also forced to remove the literacy test provisions that *de facto* prevented blacks from registering to vote.

⁶The effectiveness of the VRA in promoting black representation was often questioned by civil right activists and the popular press. For example, in 1976 the March edition of *Ebony* reported that “*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).

in county commissions, the most important local government body in the US South. We also find that this effect varies depending on pre-existing electoral rules, e.g. gains in blacks office holding took place only in covered counties where commissions were elected by district rather than at-large. This indicates that the enforcement of VRA provisions tackling vote dilution tactics, e.g. pre-clearance, were effective.

In the US South, county governing bodies are entrusted with *budget authority*, e.g. they have the power to levy taxes and appropriate funds for county expenditures on essential public services and infrastructure such as roads, sanitation, parks and recreation, housing, urban development, education facilities, public utilities etc. As a result, the election of black commissioners, besides enhancing descriptive representation of previously disenfranchised blacks, could fundamentally change their substantive representation in the domain of chronically under-provided local public goods. Since the beginning of the century, poor education facilities (Margo 1990, Jones 1917) and the lack of basic infrastructure, such as paved street, drainage, street lights etc. (Valelly 2009) had become the hallmark of Southern black communities. As a result, the election of local black officials was hailed as a vehicle for ameliorating the provision of local public goods that were highly salient for the black electorate.⁷ Models of identity politics provide indeed formal arguments for why *descriptive* representation should matter for *substantive* representation (Besley and Coate 1997). Despite the theoretical and intuitive appeal of this proposition, the evidence on the effect of black office holding on policy remains to date essentially anecdotal.⁸ Our novel data on black elected officials allow us to systematically assess this largely untested hypothesis, by analyzing the link between black commissioners and local public spending by county governments.

To this end, taking advantage of the fact that black office holding crucially depends on the share of African Americans enfranchised by the VRA, we investigate how the relationship between the pre-existing share of blacks and spending by local governments changed over time in counties that were covered under Section 5 of the VRA. Since counties with larger shares

⁷As pointed out by Wirt (1997), “*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*” (Wirt 1997, page 69).

⁸For example, Button (1989) documents a positive correlation between share of black elected officials and the improvement in street paving and recreational facilities in six communities. For an overview see Wright (2013).

of blacks might have seen changes in spending even in the absence of the VRA provisions that fostered black representation, to isolate the effect of black office holding we implement again a differences-in-differences design, where we exploit two sources of heterogeneity, e.g. *coverage* and *pre-existing electoral rules*. In particular, since coverage led to an increase in the share of black commissioners only within counties with district-type elections (SMD) then – if the identity of commissioners matters – this particular group of counties should experience a differential change in the relationship between spending and black population. Under the assumption that, had they not elected more blacks, covered SMD counties would have experienced the same spending patterns as the comparison group, we can then identify the effect of black office holding on spending. Our results show that covered SMD counties with larger fractions of African Americans – that in the pre-VRA period do not display different spending patterns – by the late seventies experience a faster growth in local capital spending, which is financed mainly through debt. On the other hand, we do not uncover significantly different patterns for current outlays that include payments for welfare and salaries. These results continue to hold when we deploy the GDR design. We conclude that, while counties electing more black commissioners benefited from increased local public goods provision, they did not enjoy larger individual transfers. The salience of local public good 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 enactment of the VRA, Martin Luther King highlighted the crucial role its provisions were likely to play: “*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 official. Three years later, blacks were in office in 12 counties; some 15 years down the road, they were serving in 52 Mississippi counties. The federal scrutiny mandated by coverage worked: in less than two decades it transformed the racial make-up 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 2 reviews the related liter-

ature, whereas section 3 provides background information on the VRA and on how it was enforced. Section 4 introduces the main features of the dataset used in the analysis, and section 5 presents our main results. In section 6 we study the effect of black representation on local public spending, and section 7 concludes.

2 Literature Review

Our paper contributes to different streams of the literature. Models of identity politics underscore the importance of descriptive representation as a pre-condition for substantive representation (Besley and Coate 1997). The widespread use of political reservation measures to remedy the under-representation of disadvantaged groups has fostered a lively debate on the merits and drawbacks of prescriptive tools – such as quotas – that may distort political competition (Besley, Folke, Persson, and Rickne 2017). In the United States, the issue of minority representation has been tackled with a different approach, relying on a legal apparatus to protect the rights of re-enfranchised African Americans. Although the legalistic approach embedded in the VRA had the advantage of being less intrusive, its effectiveness in promoting descriptive representation has been questioned. In fact, in the post-VRA period, the rise in the number of African Americans elected to state and federal offices has been disappointingly slow, and has been attributed to the increase in “minority-majority” districts, which took place more than 20 years after the passage of the VRA (Handley and Grofman 1994).

At the local level, where the journey toward black office holding likely began, systematic evidence remains scant, and we still lack a causal analysis of the impact of the VRA on black office holding.⁹ In this paper we fill this gap using a novel dataset covering local black

⁹Several studies have analyzed the patterns of elected officials by race throughout the seventies, typically focusing on individual 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 that varies between 1970 and 1980, and a final period in the late eighties or early nineties, they show that the largest gains in black representation took place in cities that switched from elections at-large to single member districts. Marschall, Ruhil, and Shah (2013) analyze a panel of city councils using data from the International City/County Management Associations (ICMA) at five-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 under Section 5 of the VRA. Marschall, Ruhil, and Shah (2010), focussing instead on a sample of 300 school boards and councils, find that

elected officials across *all* levels of local governments in the former Confederacy, before and after the passage of the VRA. This allows us to study the differential effect of the legislation across local offices, including county commissions that exercise control over local public finances. Most importantly, by deploying a differences-in-differences identification strategy and a geographic discontinuity design, our analysis is the first to provide causal evidence on the impact of the VRA on local black representation.

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 taxes provisions. Cascio and Washington (2014), focussing 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 identity politics can be ruled out as a driving factor of state spending decisions. Our analysis differs from previous work on the VRA because, by shifting the focus from state to local governments, we show that in fact the identity politics channel matters and can explain a substantial fraction of the increase in county government spending within covered jurisdictions. Therefore, our results can be rationalized by models of identity politics highlighting the importance of elected representatives' characteristics in shaping policies (Corvalan, Querubin, and Vicente 2018), particularly when they belong to traditionally under-represented groups identified by race, ethnicity or gender (Besley et al. 2004, Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004, Pande 2005, Besley, Folke, Persson, and Rickne 2017).

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.¹⁰ In the standard set up (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 can drive efficiency-enhancing growth in public good provision with diffuse benefits. Consistently with their predictions, our

the odds of blacks winning office increase with elections by single member districts. For a comprehensive overview, see Marschall, Ruhil, and Shah (2010).

¹⁰For an overview of the literature on electoral incentives and public spending see Ting, Snyder, and Hirano (2018).

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 towards mutually beneficial goals, e.g. investment on growth-enhancing policies.¹¹ This “*biracial coalition for economic growth*” (Wright 2013) might also have played a role in explaining why black office holders were influential, even though they typically remained a minority group within local elected bodies.

3 The 1965 Voting Rights Act

The Fifteenth Amendment of the US Constitution explicitly prohibited the denial or abridgment of the right to vote on account of race, but in the years after Reconstruction it was systematically violated in the US South. Efforts to address this issue in the post-WWII period were – in the words of Attorney General Katzenbach – frustrated by “... *evasion, obstruction, delay and disrespect,*”¹² and required the right to vote to be vindicated “...*in suit after suit, in county after county,*” with negligible practical effects. 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 Voting Rights Act offered such a method. Special provisions were devised for jurisdictions where the potential for discrimination was believed to be the greatest. Under Section 4 these were identified as those states and political subdivisions that imposed a test or device restricting the right to vote, and experienced a turnout below 50 percent in the previous presidential election. In 1965, seven of the eleven Confederate states - Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Virginia, and North Carolina fell in this category.¹³ Under Section 5, these covered jurisdictions were subject to pre-clearance by the

¹¹As emphasized by Wirt (1997), “*Whites reported that black empowerment had helped them overturn the old powers and the planters who had blocked racial and economic change.*”

¹²Statement before the House Judiciary Committee, rendered on March 18, 1965, page 4.

¹³More precisely in 1965, six states (Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Virginia) were fully covered and one (North Carolina) was partially covered (i.e. of the 100 North Carolina counties,

US District Court for the District of Columbia or by the Attorney General of any change in legislation affecting voting. Furthermore, the Attorney General could dispatch federal examiners and request that federal observers monitor activities within their polling places. All covered jurisdictions were also forced to remove the literacy test provisions that *de facto* prevented blacks from registering to vote.

Coverage represented an unprecedented intervention by the federal government on matters typically reserved to the states by the Constitution,¹⁴ and created a new status quo, dramatically reducing the ability of sub-federal entities to circumvent the Fifteenth Amendment. The enforcement of the VRA was far from smooth. At the state level, strategic redistricting was used to dilute the black vote. As a result, by the early '80s less than a third of the majority African American counties elected a black state representative. At the local, level redistricting was more difficult, and an intense battle was fought in courts throughout the '70s, focusing on electoral rules, which played a key role in minority representation. Traditionally, the selection of local officials took place either in “at-large elections”, where the majority at the local level (e.g. county, city etc.) elected *all* the representatives, or in “district systems”, where representatives were instead chosen in districts or local wards.¹⁵ As elections by district – viewed as more favorable to minorities’ candidates – came under attack, the legal arm of pre-clearance became crucial to block this type of vote-diluting practices.¹⁶ Switches toward elections at-large were successfully challenged in court under Section 5, so that covered states could retain district type elections.

Right after the passage of the VRA, black elected officials began to serve on county governments, municipalities and school boards, where virtually no African American had been in office since the times of Reconstruction. Reports of black office holding gains started to regularly make the headlines of local newspapers, suggesting that the enfranchisement

39 fell under the provisions of Section 5). Arkansas, Florida, Tennessee and Texas were instead not covered.

¹⁴In fact, its constitutionality was immediately but unsuccessfully challenged in *South Carolina v. Katzenbach* (383 U.S. 301 (1966)). Coverage provisions have remained in place until 2013, when the Supreme Court struck down Section 4 as unconstitutional (*Shelby County v. Holder* (570 U.S. 2 (2013))).

¹⁵City 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.

¹⁶See section 5.5.

of this group was fundamentally changing the make-up of locally elected bodies.¹⁷ 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. The goal of this paper is to address this gap, by assessing how the special provisions put in place by the VRA changed local government in the US South.

4 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 if the latter also affected local public finances. To carry out our analysis, we have built a rich dataset, which is described below.

4.1 Local black elected officials

While biographical data on members of the US House of Representatives and Senate are easily available from the Congressional Directories,¹⁹ similar information on local elected officials at the county, municipality 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, both at the national and local level. As a result, a directory – the National Roster of Black Elected Officials (NRBEO) – began to be published in 1969,

¹⁷In 1967, just two years after the passage of the VRA, for example, the 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 per cent 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.”¹⁸

¹⁹A digital version is available in ICPSR Study 7803.

reporting the name, the office held and the address of all black elected officials. The Roster has been subsequently updated at a yearly frequency by the Joint Center for Political Studies, becoming the most authoritative source of data on black elected officials in the US.²⁰

The NRBEO 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. 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 percent 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 sources. 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 has been to provide comprehensive information on black elected officials at the national, state and local levels, the data collection methodology has improved over time.²¹ As a result, under-counting 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.²²

²⁰The NRBEO 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 Government only in 1987 and in 1992.

²¹As 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.”*

²²To verify the quality of the information from the NRBEO, we have compared it with the Census of Government 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 NRBEO and the Census use the same geographical unit of observation), and to the 1987 directory of the NRBEO (which matches the survey period used in the Census), we find that out of 1,023 entries (the 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 percent). Importantly, differences between unmatched observations by coverage status are not statistically significant at conventional levels.

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 (e.g. commissions, judiciary and enforcement bodies, and other offices), municipalities and school districts for the eleven states of the Confederacy.²³ For the period prior to the introduction of the VRA, no systematic effort to identify local black elected officials has 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 data covers black elected officials in all local offices between 1962 and 1980 in 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 thirty-folds. 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 out of a total of 1,102 (i.e. 2 percent 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 7 individuals in office.²⁴ No clear geographic pattern can be identified though. By 1980, on the other hand, 488 counties, or 44 percent 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 instead any black local elected official. By 1980, counties electing blacks were also clearly concentrated in covered states (65 percent of them). Furthermore, as shown in Figure A.1 in the Appendix, by 1980, the geographic distribution of black representation

²³The National Roster 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.

²⁴Hobson City in Calhoun county was Alabama’s first self-governed, all black municipality.

closely followed the distribution of blacks in the total population.

Figure 1: Number of black elected officials, 1964

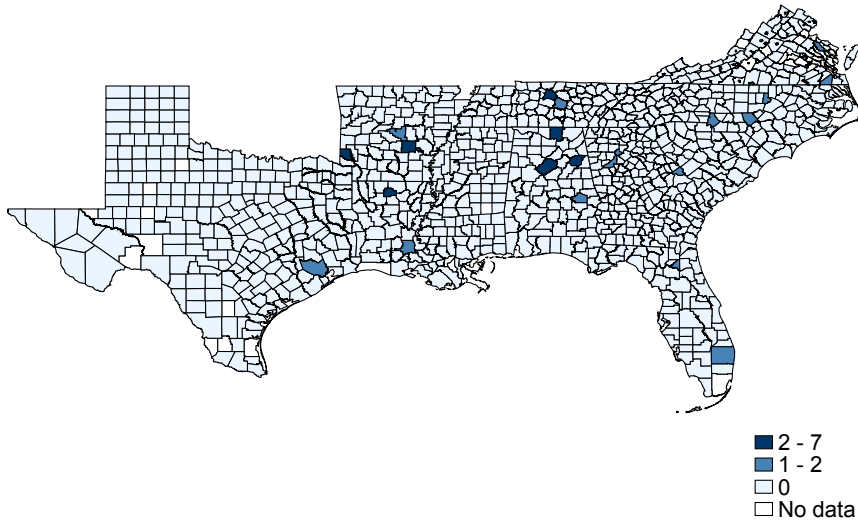
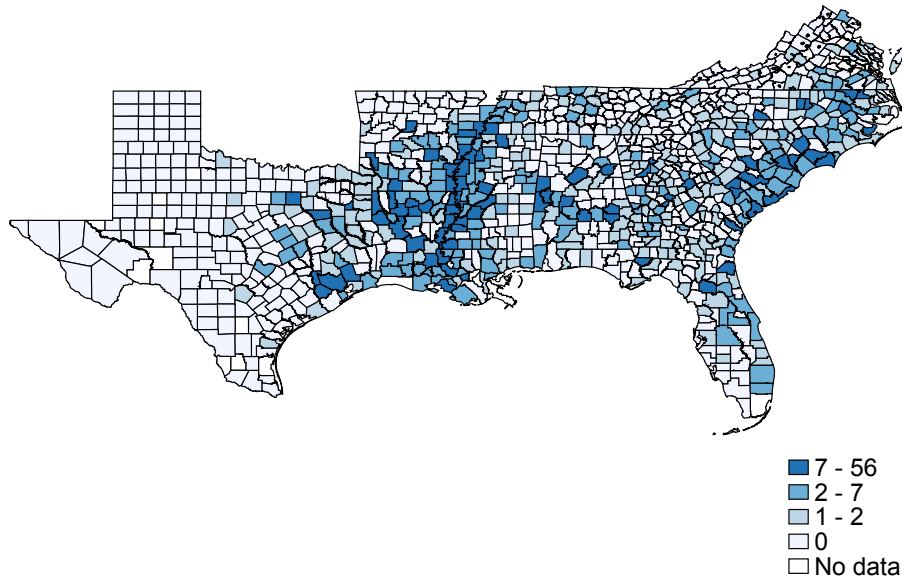


Figure 2: Number of black elected officials, 1980



Focusing on the year prior to the passage of the VRA and on the last year of our sample, Table A.1 reports summary statistics for the variables used in our analysis, distinguishing between counties that were covered or not in 1965.²⁵ Our main variable of interest is the

²⁵The covered counties are all counties in the fully covered states (Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina and Virginia) and 39 counties in North Carolina that were covered in 1965 (see the Appendix).

share of blacks elected to each local office, which is defined as:

$$ShareBlackElected_{cot} = \frac{BlackElected_{cot}}{Elected_{cot}} \quad (1)$$

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 1967 and 1977.²⁶ The latter reports the total number of elected officials for county governments (e.g. commission, judiciary and enforcement, and other offices), municipalities and school districts, aggregated at the county level. 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.²⁷

As we can see from the top panel of Table A.1, in covered counties, the proportion of blacks in all local government levels rose from 0.11 percent immediately before the VRA to 7.03 percent by the early eighties. The increase was much more modest instead in counties that were not covered, where the average share of black elected officials in the last year of our sample was only 2.16 percent. Turning to representation at specific levels of government, our data indicate that the largest increase is to be observed in school districts in covered counties. From a situation in which there were no black elected officers in 1964, by 1980 5.81 percent were black; this change was much larger than the one observed in non-covered counties, where the increase was from 0.07 percent in 1964 to 1.40 percent in 1980. As for municipalities, in covered counties we observe an increase in black representation from 0.18 percent in 1964 to 5.35 percent in 1980; in non-covered counties, the corresponding change was from 0.04 to 1.91 percent. Finally, black representation in county governments went

²⁶The number of local elected officials by county is only available for these two years in our sample period. We therefore use the 1967 figure as the denominator for the congressional years up to 1972, and the 1977 figure thereafter. The average number of all local elected officials slightly declined between 1967 and 1977. In particular, it decreased from 25 to 22 for county governments, and from 18 to 17 for school districts, whereas it increased from 26 to 27 for municipalities. The variation in the overall number of all local elected officials is modest, and follows the same pattern in covered and non-covered states. The same is true for the elected in county governments, whereas the number of those elected in municipalities and school districts respectively slightly increases and declines only in non-covered states.

²⁷For example, the share of blacks in county commissions is given by the ratio between the number of black commissioners and the total number of elected in county governments.

from 0 in 1964 to 4.09 percent by 1980 in covered counties, while the corresponding figure in 1980 was only 0.61 percent for non-covered counties. As a result, 60 percent of the increase in representation in county governments is accounted for by county commissions, 30 percent by judiciary and enforcement bodies and the remaining 10 percent by other county officials.

4.2 Other control variables

The other control variables we use in our analysis are summarized in the bottom panel of Table A.1, 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 (32.42 vs. 13.18 percent); they were also smaller, less urban, and had a lower agricultural productivity.²⁸ As for the counties' economic characteristics, they share similar unemployment rates (4.96 percent in covered counties, 4.87 percent in non-covered ones), and poverty was very widespread: 46 percent of the population in covered counties lived in households falling below the poverty line, and the corresponding figure for non-covered states was only slightly lower at about 44 percent. The vast majority of the population – 74 and 71 percent in covered and non-covered counties, respectively – was unskilled.²⁹ Finally, counties in covered states were characterized by greater racial tensions, as measured by the number of episodes of both pro-black and anti-black protest registered between 1960 and 1964.

Summing up, the counties in covered and non-covered states 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 5.4 we assess the robustness of our findings implementing a geographic discontinuity research design (GDR), where we take advantage of the fact that counties spanning the border between a covered and a non-covered state are more “similar” than a pair of counties taken at random, also with respect to the share of African Americans in the population.

²⁸As cotton was the dominant crop in the South, we use county cotton suitability as a measure of agricultural productivity.

²⁹The share of unskilled is the county percentage of 25 years old or more with less than a high school diploma.

5 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. We turn then to the presentation of an event study and of the long difference estimates. We subsequently present our GDR design to address potential threats to identification, and finally we investigate the role of electoral rules.

5.1 Estimation strategy

Before 1965, seven states of the former Confederacy - Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, North 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 (known as 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 greater in areas where the share of blacks 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.*”³⁰ Thus, given the salience of race, we posit that the effect of the VRA on black office holding at the local level should depend on the county pre-existing share of blacks. Hence, a straightforward way to estimate the effect of the VRA on black representation is to investigate how the relationship between the pre-existing share of blacks in the county population and the share of blacks elected in local governments changed over time within states which were covered under Section 5 of

³⁰Quoted by Wright (2013), page 202.

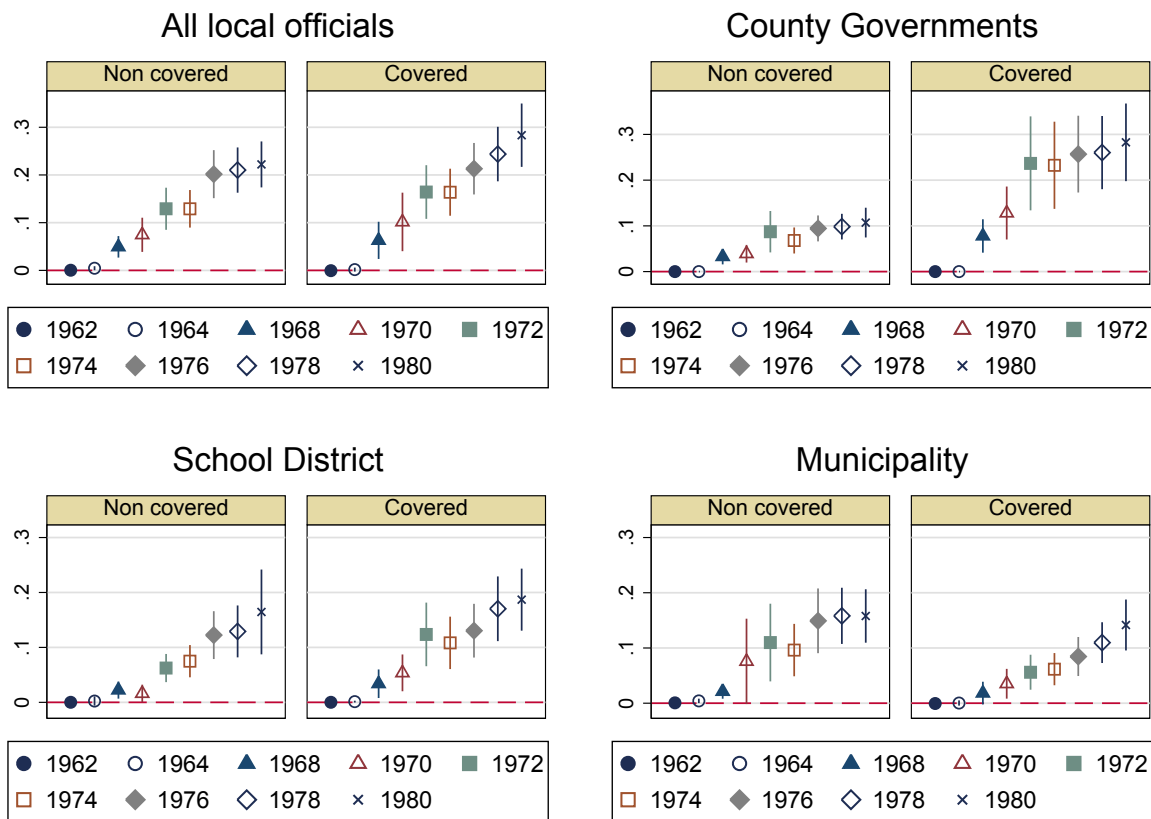
the VRA. In particular, if the legislation had an effect, we would expect the slope of this relationship to increase around the time of the passage of the Act.

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 pre-existing black population (treatment group) experienced a larger increase in black representation – from before to after the VRA – when compared to the counties of the other former Confederate states that were not covered (control group). Our identifying assumption is that, in the absence of coverage, the two groups – that in the pre-VRA period did not exhibit any substantial difference in black representation – would have experienced the same trends in the election of black elected officials.

5.2 Event study

To illustrate the evolution of the relationship between the share of black elected officials and the percentage of blacks in 1960, we plot in Figure 3 the coefficients obtained by regressing the share of black office holders in the Congressional Election years on the 1960 share of blacks, separately by year and treatment status. In all our specifications, we also include state fixed effects – so that the coefficients represent within-state effects – and a number of other pre-VRA county characteristics, e.g. unemployment rate, percentage of families below the poverty line, percentage of unskilled, agricultural productivity, population, percent urban, pro- and anti-black activism. In the top left panel we consider all local elected officials, and turning clockwise we focus next on county governments, municipal governments and school boards, respectively.

Figure 3: Trends in the gradient of Black Elected Officials in 1960 percent black, by treatment status and type of office.

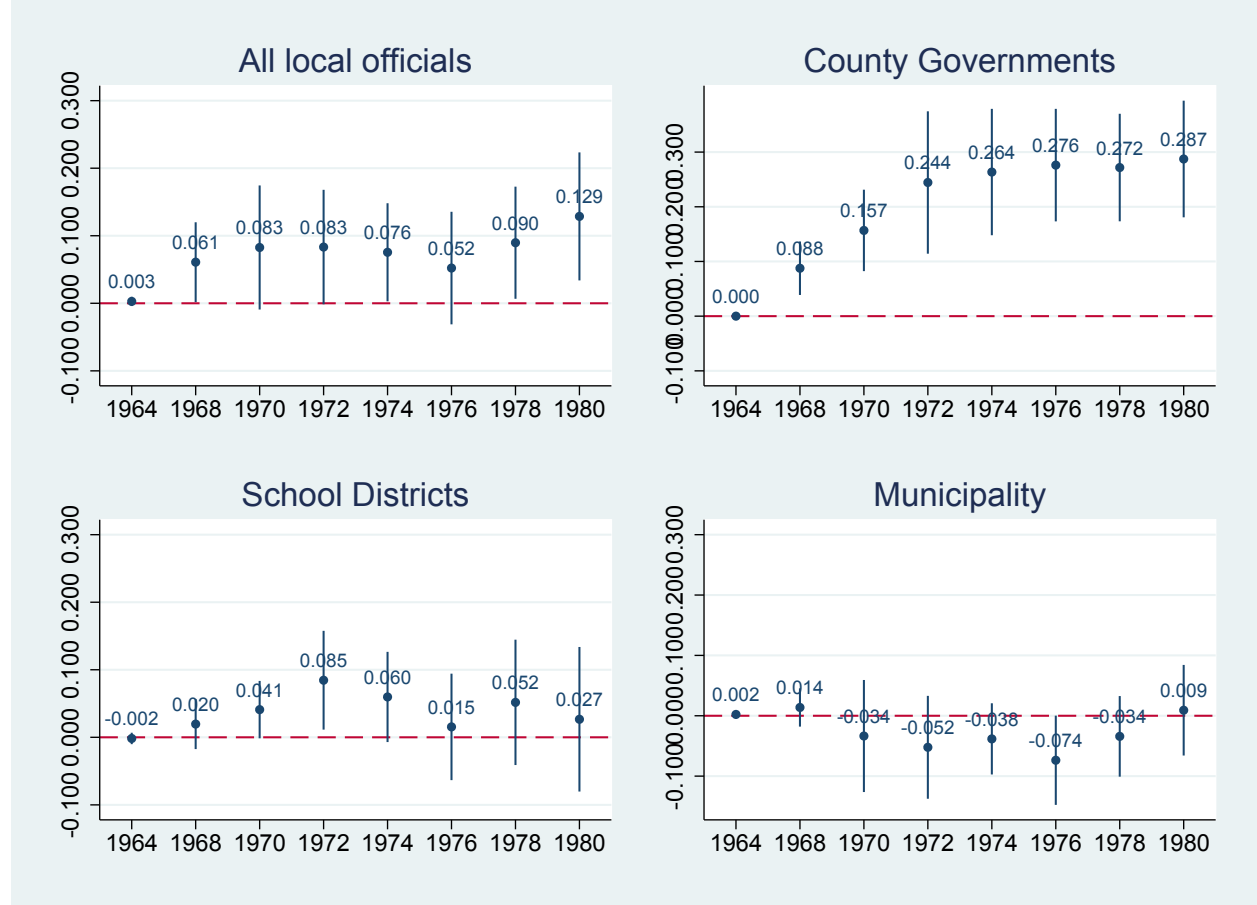


Note: Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. In all our specifications, we include unemployment rate, percentage of families below the poverty line, percentage of unskilled, agricultural productivity, population, percent urban, pro- and anti-black activism and state fixed effects.

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 the passage of the VRA, 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 percent increase in the 1960 share of blacks in a county's population is associated with a 0.58 percent increase in the share of black officials in covered states and a 0.43 percent increase in those that were not covered. By 1980, a 10 percent increase in the 1960 share of blacks is associated with an increase of around 3 percent in the share of black elected officials in covered states, and only about

2 percent in the share of black elected officials in non-covered 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 municipality.

Figure 4: Difference in the gradient of Black Elected Officials in 1960 percent black between covered and non-covered counties, by type of office.



Note: Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. In all our specifications, we include unemployment rate, percentage of families below the poverty line, percentage of unskilled, agricultural productivity, population, percent urban, pro- and anti-black activism, state-year interactions and county fixed effects. Omitted interaction: 1962

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

$$\begin{aligned}
 ShareBlackElected_{cst} = & \sum_{n>1962} \gamma_n D_n^t PercentBlack_{1960} + \\
 & + \sum_{n>1962} \theta_n D_n^t PercentBlack_{1960} \times Covered_{cs} + \mathbf{X}'_{cs} \beta + I_{st} + I_c + \epsilon_{cs}
 \end{aligned} \tag{2}$$

where $ShareBlackElected_{cst}$ is the share of black elected officials, $PercentBlack_{1960}$ is the share of black population in 1960, $Covered_{cs}$ is an indicator taking a value of one if the county was covered in 1965, D_n^t is an indicator taking a value of one 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. In all our specification standard errors are clustered at the county level. As in our specification we include county fixed effects, to identify the model we omit the interactions with the first year of the sample, e.g. we use the first year (1962) as 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 changes over time. In Figure 4, we plot the estimated coefficients θ_n , which capture the difference in the gradient between covered and non-covered 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.

5.3 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 Act (1980). 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 the years following the VRA introduction.

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

$$\Delta ShareBlack Elected_{cs} = \gamma Percent Black_{1960} + \theta Percent Black_{1960} \times Covered_{cs} + \mathbf{X}'_{cs} \beta + I_s + \epsilon_{cs} \quad (3)$$

where the dependent variable $\Delta ShareBlack Elected_{cs}$ is the change in the share of black elected officials in county c in state s between 1964 and 1980 and I_s is a state fixed effect (that captures 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, agricultural productivity, population, percent urban, pro- and anti-black activism. 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, i.e. the coefficient θ .

Our identifying assumption is that, in the absence of coverage, black representation would have changed in the same way in the treated and non-treated counties. The absence of significantly different pre-VRA trends in black office holding between treatment and control group in our event study is reassuring for our identification strategy. At the same time, Southern engagement with civil rights issues had been on the rise since the aftermath of the World War II. Thus – despite the absence of pre-VRA trends in black elected officials – covered counties with larger shares of blacks might have experienced different long term trends in other important outcomes related to the civil right movement, which could cast doubts on the suitability of non-covered counties as a control group. To assuage these concerns, in Table A.2, we run a series of placebo exercises focussing on long term pre-VRA trends in black political activism, anti-civil right sentiment and voters' turnout.³¹ Reassuringly, while it is generally the case that in the pre-VRA period counties with larger shares of blacks do indeed experience a significant increase in black political activism, anti-civil right sentiment and overall turnout, this pattern is the same for both covered and non-covered counties.

³¹To measure black political activism we have collected information on the presence of local branches of the National Association of Colored People (NAACP) by county. Our measure of change in black political activism is thus given by the difference in counts of NAACP local branches between 1964 and 1940. For the same period, we have also collected information on the change in the number of Ku Klux Klan (KKK) klaverns by county that we use as a proxy of the long term trend in anti-civil right sentiment. Moreover, since in the 1964 presidential election, the republican candidate (Barry Goldwater) ran on a largely anti-civil right platform, we use the change in support for Goldwater compared to the republican vote share obtained by Eisenhower in the 1952 election as an alternative proxy for the evolution of anti-civil right sentiment. Finally, we use the change in turnout between the presidential elections of 1964 and 1952 to capture the overall long term trend in political participation in the pre-VRA period.

Turning now to the long-run analysis of black office holding, Table 1 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 only for the share of blacks in 1960, and its interaction with the coverage dummy. As we can immediately see, counties with a larger pre-VRA black population elect a larger proportion of black officials; furthermore, the change in elected 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. We find that counties with higher pre-VRA unemployment rates and more urban counties tend to elect a greater share of black officials, whereas the opposite is true for counties with larger shares of unskilled. On the other hand, poverty, population and productivity of the agricultural sector do not display significant effects. Importantly, including these additional controls does not affect the sign and significance of our main findings on coverage.

Finally, to account for the increase in racial tensions recorded in the years prior to the passage of the VRA we use two measures, “Pro-black protest, 1960-1964” and “Anti-black protest, 1960-1964”, which are respectively based on the counts of pro- and anti-black events occurred between 1960-1964, as reported by the Dynamics of Collective Action Dataset at the state and city level, which we carefully mapped to the corresponding counties.³² Our results reported in column (3) indicate that a larger occurrence of pro-black protests in the immediate pre-VRA period is correlated with a higher share of blacks subsequently elected to local public office. At the same time, counties characterized by more of anti-black protests between 1960-1964 tend to subsequently elect a lower number of blacks to office, even though this effect is not statistically significant. In the last specification of Table 1 (column (4)), we additionally allow the impact of the control variables to vary between covered and non-covered counties, to rule out the possibility that the patterns we have identified might be driven by other sources of heterogeneity among counties in covered states.³³ Importantly,

³²For more details on the construction of the variables, see the Appendix.

³³The estimated coefficients of all control variables by treatment status are available upon request.

our main results are robust.

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 in column (4) of Table 1 indicates that a 10 percent increase in a county’s share of blacks in 1960 leads to a 1.9 percent increase in the share of black elected officials in non-covered states and an additional 1.3 percent in covered states.

In the upper panel of Table 2 we investigate the effects of the VRA on black representation in different types of local offices using the same specification as in column (4) of Table 1. In columns (1)-(3) we analyze county governments; in column (4) we consider municipal governments and finally in column (5) we examine school boards. The estimation results in Table 2 confirm the findings we have uncovered in our event study using all years between 1964-1980. As we can see in columns (1)-(3), coverage leads to an increase in black representation in all county governments, but the effect is much larger for enforcement bodies and county commissions (columns (1)-(2)). On the other hand, coverage does not produce larger gains in black office holding in school boards (column (4)) and municipalities (column (5)). Thus, analyzing black office holding in all local elected offices across Southern states, we reach the following conclusions. First, while the gains that we estimate among 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, clerks etc., we find that black representation also increased in the most powerful local governments in the US South: county commissions. Importantly, coverage doubles the extent to which black enfranchisement lead to office holding among county commissioners. 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 boards. This finding is consistent with previous accounts of black representation attributing the slow progress in black office holding in covered municipalities and school boards to the fact that both inherited from the Progressive Era electoral rules unfavorable to minorities, which remained in place through the '70s.³⁴

³⁴Although systematic data for all school boards 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 to low turnout (Marschall, Ruhil, and Shah 2010). Such rules

5.4 Threats to identification

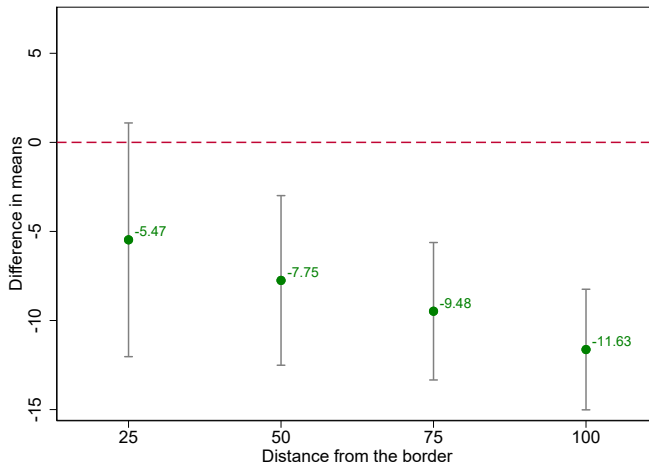
Our baseline results show that coverage significantly increased the extent to which the enfranchisement of African Americans led to black office holding in county governments. Our identifying assumption is that, in the absence of coverage, counties in all former Confederate states would have followed the same pattern in the election of blacks. In fact, we have shown that in the pre-VRA period, conditioning on black population shares, treatment and control group – which shared a similar history of discrimination and black disenfranchisement – did not display different patterns in black office holding or other measures of political participation and civil society’s engagement with racial issues. However, the fact that the two groups differ along economic and demographic characteristics we have controlled for may raise further concerns.

In particular, in 1960, the share of blacks in the total population was substantially larger in covered states than in non-covered ones. Although there is enough variation in the share of African Americans to insure the existence of a sufficient degree of common support in black shares 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 with black population shares outside the common support, e.g. in the top quintile of the distribution. Second, heterogeneity on observables increases the sensitivity to potential bias due to unobserved covariates. Since matching on pre-treatment variables reduces both bias and heterogeneity (Rosenbaum 2005), we address these concerns by deploying a geographic discontinuity research design (GDR) where we compare more homogeneous contiguous counties spanning the border between covered and non-covered states. In fact, as we can see in Figure 5, 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

persisted since legal challenges to elections at-large during the ’70s 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 1965-1980 the average incidence of challenges to elections at-large - computed as ratio between number of cases and units of local government affected - is 15 percent for counties but only 5 percent for municipalities. After 1980, legal action at the municipal level increases, with an average incidence of cases of 13 percent, suggesting that the effect of coverage on black representation at municipal level did take longer to materialize.

less than 25 miles from the state boundary). Counties sharing a border between covered and non-covered states are more “similar” to each other also with respect to the other covariates used in our model. To see this point, consider Figures 6 and 7, where we plot the coefficients of the treatment variable obtained from within regressions run on the 254 county-pairs in our border sample. As we can see, county-pairs do not exhibit statistically significant differences either in pre-VRA covariates values (Figure 6) or pre- and post-VRA trends (7).

Figure 5: Difference in percent black 1960, by distance from the border.



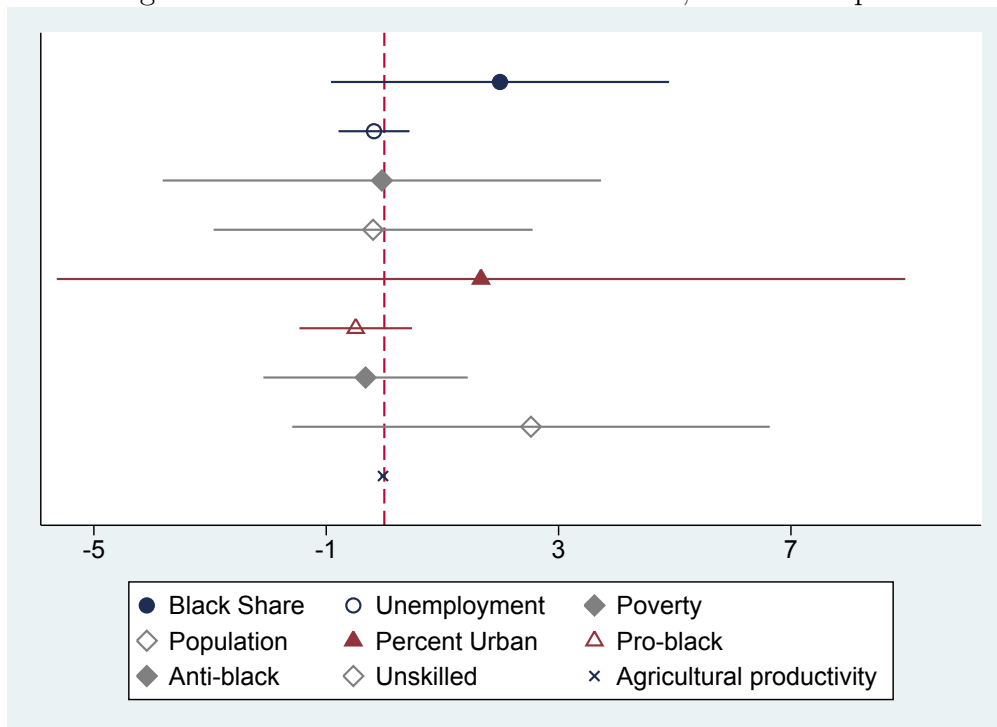
Note: Bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Thus, combining our differences-in-differences estimation strategy with a GDR design, we estimate whether covered counties with larger pre-existing share of blacks experience a larger increase in black office holding than non-covered counties with which they share a border, from before to after the passage of the VRA:

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

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} (i.e. county-pair specific trends in our long-run specification). Hence, the effect of the VRA on black representation is identified out of the variation within county-pairs spanning the border between covered and non-covered states. The bottom panel of Table 2 presents the GDR estimation results. Despite the significant reduction in sample size, our main results are

Figure 6: Balance in the covariates values, border sample.

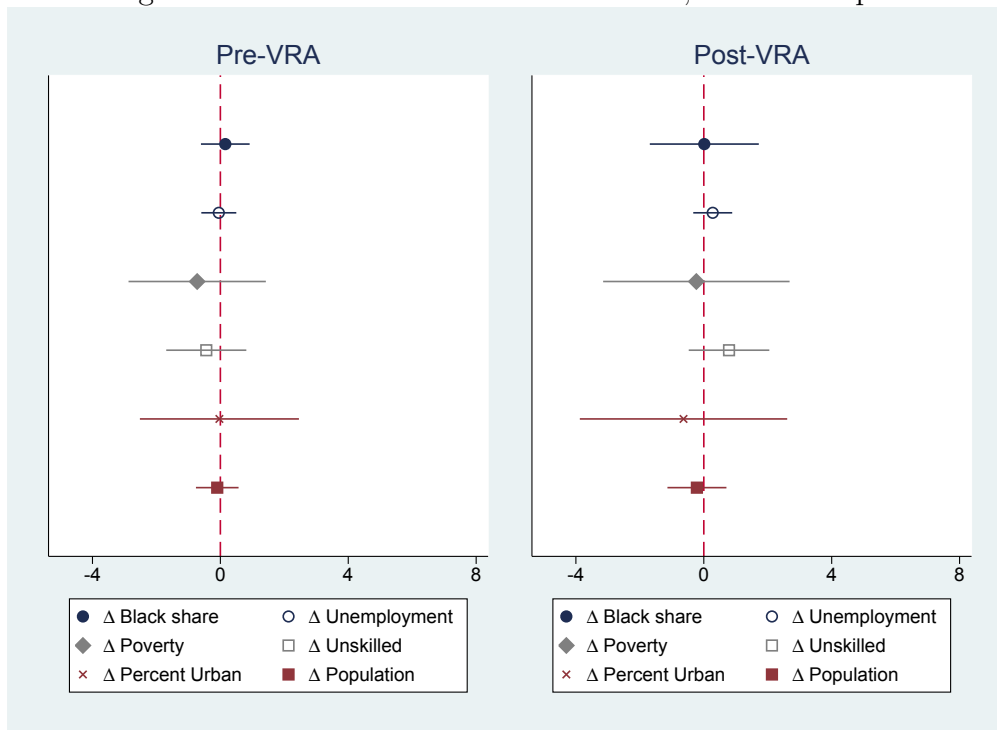


Note: Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Estimated coefficients obtained regressing each variable on the coverage indicator and county-pair fixed effects.

broadly robust: compared to the neighboring counties on the other side of the border within non-covered states, counties within covered states experience a significantly larger increase in the share of black county commissioners (column (1)) and enforcement officers (column (2)). For school boards (column (5)) the effect of coverage is only marginally significant, whereas again black representation in municipalities (column (4)) is not affected by coverage.

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

Figure 7: Balance in the covariates trends, border sample.



Note: Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Estimated coefficients obtained regressing each variable on the coverage indicator and county-pair fixed effects.

5.5 Electoral rules and black representation

As discussed in Section 3, covered states 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 they 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 will 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 consistently 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 the pre-clearance requirement, 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.³⁵ 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 counties in covered states with pre-existing electoral rules favorable to the election of minorities (e.g. SMD) experienced larger gains in black representation.

To address these questions, we collect and exploit information on the election rules of county governing bodies as reported by the 1957 Census of Governments and the 1980 National Roster of Black Elected Officials.

Focussing 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 single member districts (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 pre-clearance, 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 South Carolina) were on a transition path toward SMD and one (North Carolina) retained a system of elections at-large.³⁶

³⁵As pointed out by Martin Luther King, Jr., “*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 (...)*” (King 1965).

³⁶The 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. In 1973, the Supreme Court ruling on *White vs. Regester* (412 U.S. 755, 1973), and its subsequent application by the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in *Zimmer vs. McKeithen* (485 F.2 d1297), laid out the standards for evaluating whether at-large elections diluted minority voting strength. The key passage of *Zimmer vs. McKeithen*, which became known as the “Zimmer formula”, augmented the provisions already contained in the *White vs. 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*

In column (1) of Table 3 we analyze whether covered counties that retained their pre-VRA SMD system display a different pattern compared to the others. 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 single member districts is key to the election of black officials since coverage leads to an increase in black office holding only when county commissioners are elected by district.³⁷

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 the SMD and those that switched toward it. Our results show that counties within covered 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 black 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 election rules, the pattern in black representation should be the opposite than the one 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 heterogenous effect of *coverage* based on *pre-existing electoral rules* implies that pre-clearance provisions – protecting pre-existing SMD arrangements – helped promoting growth in black representation. Thus, contrary to pessimistic views that the

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

³⁷Our results are also robust to trimming the sample to common support (Table A.3 in Appendix) and to restricting the analysis to the border sample (Table A.5, Panel B in Appendix).

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, non-legal 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 insure the implementation of the VRA.³⁸ Thus, the enforcement of pre-clearance – beyond its mechanical effect – might have been crucial to give black voters *confidence* in their ability to change the racial make-up of elected offices.

6 Black elected officials and local public spending

Our results so far show that the VRA, by fundamentally changing the make-up of the electorate in the US South, produced an important shift in the characteristics of individuals elected to local offices. Our analysis also highlights 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.*”³⁹ However, black office holding in time brought bigger expectations in the domain of policy toward deprived black communities, suffering from chronic under-provision of local public goods.⁴⁰

³⁸In King’s 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 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*” (King 1965).

³⁹Quoted by Wright (2013), page 202.

⁴⁰Poor black communities in the South often lacked basic infrastructure, such as paved street, were deficient in the areas of sanitation, drainage, sidewalks and street lights (Valelly 2009), and their school facilities have been described as “*miserable beyond all description*” (Jones 1917, page 15). They also suffered from limited access to parks, playgrounds and recreational facilities, which were mostly reserved to whites (Button 1989).

In fact, as pointed out by Button (1989) , “*Black citizens often had high expectations that their black representatives would improve their streets and parks quickly and measurably.*”⁴¹ Although several case studies indicate that the election of black officials led to an improvement in infrastructure at the local level,⁴² the evidence remains largely anecdotal. In this section, we provide a first systematic attempt at determining whether electing more African Americans to county governments led to an improvement in the provision of local public goods.

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).⁴³ 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, public utilities etc.⁴⁴, and county governments account for more than half of the overall local spending.⁴⁵

Hence, to study the relationship between black representation on local public spending, we have collected information from the Census of Government on current and capital spending by county governments, that are available at five-year intervals since 1957.⁴⁶ As we can see from Table A.4, in 1957 real spending per capita (in 2000 USD) is about 30 dollars higher in non-covered counties than in covered ones. Most of this gap – equivalent to about 10 percent of the average total spending in non-covered counties – is due to current spending, since the difference in capital spending is less than one dollar. Interestingly, by the early eighties, the spending differential in total and current spending has virtually disappeared,

As pointed out by Button (1989), survey evidence from the 1970s indicates that blacks were particularly sensitive to service provision in the domain of road, parks and recreation.

⁴¹Button (1989), page 168.

⁴²For example, Button (1989) documents a positive correlation between share of black elected officials and the improvement in street paving and recreational facilities in six communities. For an overview see Wright (2013).

⁴³Historically, 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 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”.

⁴⁴For an overview on county expenditure functions see Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (1971).

⁴⁵E.g. 56 percent in 1957 – the first year in our sample – and 52 percent in 1982, the end of our sample period.

⁴⁶For more details on the variables definition, see the Appendix.

whereas capital spending per capita is about 4 dollars higher in covered than in non-covered counties. These changes may be due to a variety of factors and our objective is to isolate the effect of black representation. Since black office holding essentially depends on the share African Americans enfranchised by the VRA, a straightforward way to estimate the effect of the VRA on spending through the black representation channel is to investigate how the relationship between the pre-existing share of blacks in the county population and spending by local governments changed over time within covered states. In particular, if black representation had an effect, we would expect the slope of this relationship to increase after the passage of the Act.

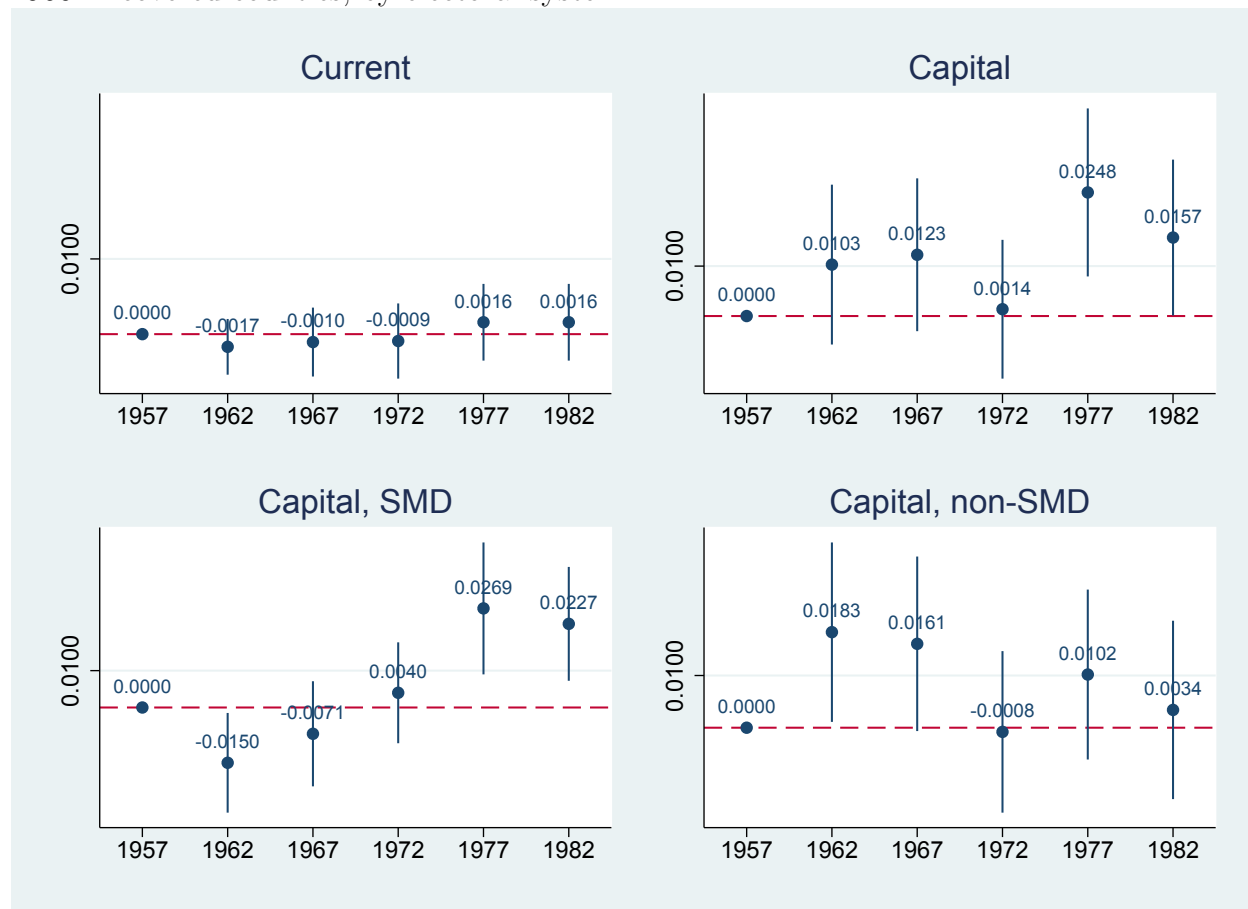
As pointed out before, one important problem with this type of strategy is that areas with larger shares of blacks in the population might have seen increases in spending even in the absence of the specific provisions included in the VRA, whether or not these provisions affected black representation. To overcome this identification problem, we implement again a differences-in-differences design where we exploit two sources of heterogeneity: coverage and pre-existing electoral rules (SMD). Once again, we study whether covered counties with a larger pre-existing black population (treatment group) experienced a larger increase in spending – from before to after the VRA – when compared to counties in the other former Confederate states that were not covered (control group). Moreover, as gains in black office holding depend on pre-existing electoral rules (SMD), we deploy a quadruple difference design to disentangle the effect of the black representation channel.⁴⁷ In particular, since, as shown before, coverage leads to an increase in the share of black commissioners only within counties with pre-existing SMD, then – if the VRA affects spending through the representation channel – this particular group of counties should experience a different spending pattern from before to after the VRA. Thus, our main coefficient of interest is the triple interaction between the share of blacks in 1960, coverage and the SMD indicator.

We begin by reporting in Figure 8 the results of an event study illustrating the difference over time in the relationship between the natural log of real county spending per capita and the 1960 share of blacks in covered counties, controlling for standard determinants of

⁴⁷The 1960 share of blacks is interacted with the coverage dummy, the SMD indicator, and coverage x SMD.

spending (e.g. 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, e.g. we use 1957 as the reference.

Figure 8: Difference in the gradient of (\ln) spending per capita on Black Elected Officials in 1960 in covered counties, by electoral system.



Note: Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. In all our specifications, we include unemployment rate, percentage of families below the poverty line, population, state year interactions and county fixed effects. Omitted interaction: 1957

As it can be evinced from the top panel, in the pre-VRA period, covered counties with larger pre-existing shares of blacks do not display a significantly different spending pattern compared to non-covered ones, and this is true for both current and capital expenditure. However, by the late seventies, while current expenditure is still comparable in the two groups, there is evidence that capital spending begins to increase at a faster rate in covered counties. In the bottom panel, still focusing to capital spending, we estimate the quadruple interaction model allowing the estimated coefficients to vary depending on the pre-existing

electoral rule. A clearer pattern emerges: the faster growth in capital spending in the post-VRA period is in fact concentrated in covered SMD counties that, if anything, display an opposite trajectory with a slightly lower growth before 1965. In other words, our event study indicates that, after the passage of the VRA, covered counties with larger shares of blacks experience a faster growth in capital spending than those that were not covered, and this growth is concentrated in counties with pre-existing electoral rules favorable to the election of blacks. We have already demonstrated that black enfranchisement led to gains in black office holding only within covered counties with pre-existing SMD. Hence, under the assumption that – had they not elected more blacks – covered SMD counties with larger black population shares would have experienced the same spending pattern than the control group, we can give a causal interpretation to our findings.

While it seems unlikely that the 1960 share of blacks in the total population might have a differential impact in covered SMD counties through different mechanisms other than representation, it is still possible that other county characteristics could be driving the spending pattern we have uncovered within this particular group of counties. To address these concerns, we assess the robustness of our findings in series of alternative specifications, focusing on the long run. Table 4 presents our estimation results using the difference in the natural log of real spending per capita between the beginning (1957) and the end (1982) of our sample period as a dependent variable. Remembering that our focus is on how the size of the initial black population affects outcomes differentially depending on coverage and pre-existing electoral rules, we start by reporting in columns (1) and (2) the estimated coefficients when we account for additional economic and demographic characteristics.⁴⁸ Importantly, to rule out the possibility that the patterns that 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 pre-existing electoral rule by estimating a fully interacted specification.⁴⁹ Our results confirm the absence of a differential pattern for current expenditure, whereas we continue to find that capital spending grew more rapidly

⁴⁸The full set of control variables includes 1960 county characteristics such as unemployment rate, percent of families below poverty line, population, percent urban, agricultural productivity, pro and anti-black activism.

⁴⁹E.g. all control variables are interacted with coverage, SMD, and coverage x SMD. The estimated coefficients are available upon request.

within covered counties with larger black population shares that elected county governing bodies by single member district.

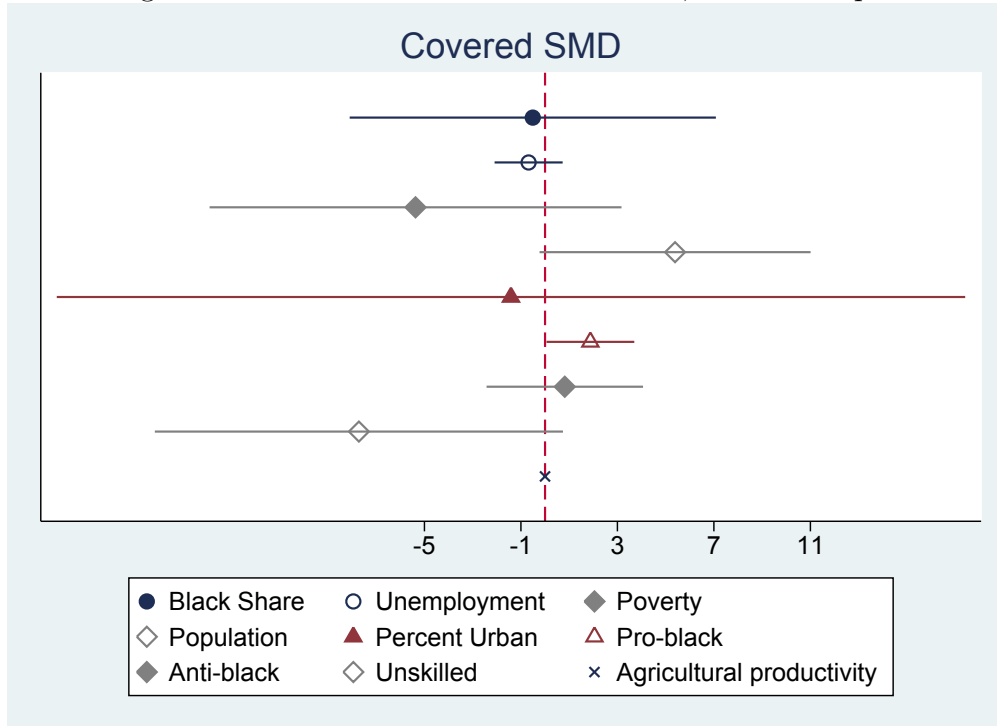
Even if in our fully interacted specification we control for potentially heterogeneous effects of many pre-VRA county characteristics in covered SMD counties, we are still concerned that spending could be affected by other channels at work within covered SMD counties. In particular, as local public spending 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 particular group of counties.⁵⁰ To address this concern, we restrict our analysis to the border sample. As we have seen in Figures 6 and 7, the border sample is balanced both on pre-existing covariates and their trends, and the same holds true if we look at coverage by election type, e.g. covered SMD counties do not display statistically significant differences in either their 1960 characteristics or their pre- and post-VRA trends (Figures 9 and 10). Thus, by restricting our attention to the border sample, we are more confident that our results are not driven by other sources of heterogeneity. The estimation results on the border sample reported in columns (3) and (4) show that the sign, magnitude, and significance of our main coefficients are not affected.

Finally, to rule out the possibility that our findings might reflect a general pattern in local spending within covered SMD counties with larger shares of blacks, rather than the effect of black representation in county commissions, 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 (for example 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 single member district.⁵¹

⁵⁰Directly accounting for changes in our explanatory variables would be problematic because of endogeneity concerns due to reverse causality, e.g. changes in spending could drive trends in counties economic and demographic characteristics.

⁵¹Since 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

Figure 9: Balance in the covariates values, border sample.



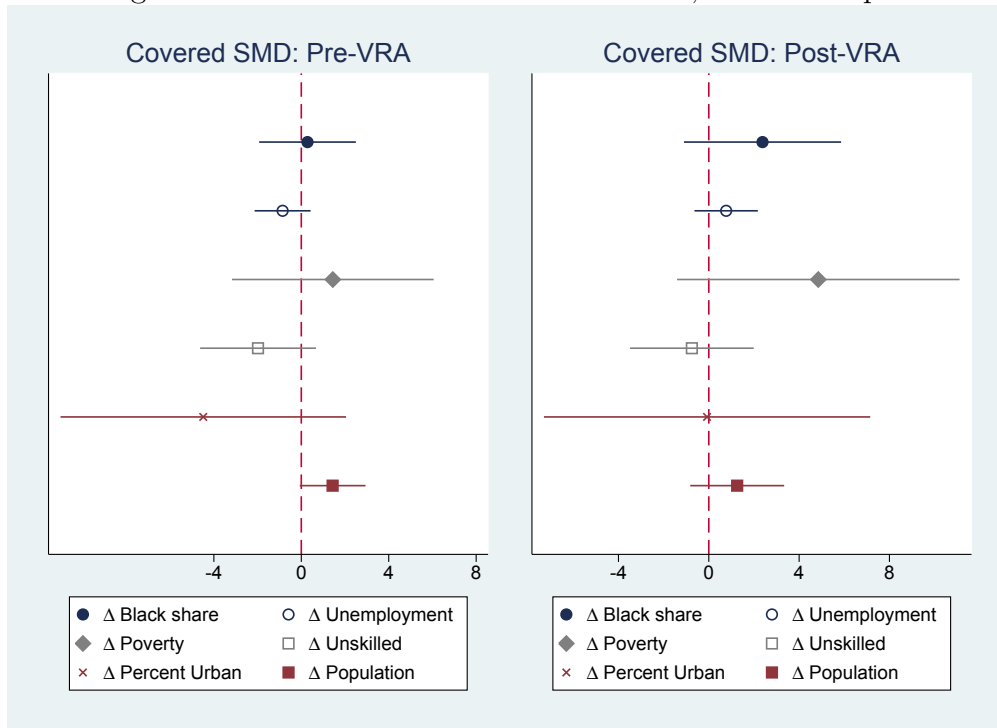
Note: Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. The figure plots the estimated coefficient of the interaction between coverage and SMD, obtained regressing each variable on the coverage indicator, SMD indicator, their interaction and county-pair fixed effects.

How big are the effects that we have uncovered? While we do not find any effect on current spending (see column (1)),⁵² our estimates of column (2) indicate that a 10 percentage increase in the 1960 share of blacks in covered counties, electing commissioners by SMD, leads to an additional 3.6 percent increase in capital spending. Given that in 1960 one third of the population in covered counties was black, this implies an additional 10.8 percent 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 2012).

How was the increase in spending financed? Local county governments raise revenues officials, running the same specification of Table 3, column (2), but using the share of black officials in other local governments instead of county commissions as dependent variable. The estimation results, reported in Table A.5 in Appendix, show that the share of other elected officials does not display any significantly different pattern within covered counties electing county commissioners by district.

⁵²Note that since current spending includes many diverse items (e.g. welfare spending, salaries, payments for supplies and contractual services etc.), it could also be the case that black office holding might affect some specific item, but not the aggregate. Unfortunately, data limitations do not allow us to investigate this possibility.

Figure 10: Balance in the covariates trends, border sample.



Note: Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. The figure plots the estimated coefficient of the interaction between coverage and SMD, obtained regressing each variable on the coverage indicator, SMD indicator, their interaction and county-pair fixed effects.

through local taxes and intergovernmental transfers.⁵³ While current expenditures are essentially financed by tax revenues, capital spending by local governments is most commonly financed by borrowing (U.S. Census Bureau 1997) and, to a much more limited extent, by tax revenues.⁵⁴ 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 lights on this issue, in Table 5 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), columns (1)-(2) of Table 5 summarize the main patterns in intergovernmental transfers and own revenues.⁵⁵ Our results show that covered SMD counties with larger shares of blacks experienced an increase in intergov-

⁵³Intergovernmental transfers amount to about 40 percent of county tax revenues at the beginning of our sample period and 35 percent at the end.

⁵⁴Capital spending is typically exempt from balanced budget requirements that apply instead to current spending.

⁵⁵The detailed variables definitions and sources are reported in Appendix.

ernmental transfers but not in own revenues. The increase in intergovernmental transfer amounts only to about one-third of the increase in capital spending though, implying that about two-thirds of the raise in local expenditure is financed through debt. These results also remain robust to the GDR design (columns (3)-(4) of Table 5).

To conclude, our analysis provides systematic evidence consistent with the historical accounts of an improvement in local infrastructure following the election of blacks (Button 1989). Covered counties electing black commissioners spend significantly more on capital projects, and this increase is financed predominantly by borrowing and, to some extent, by intergovernmental transfers. On the other hand, we do not find evidence of black office holding leading to 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.

7 Conclusions

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 restated the prohibition against the denial or abridgment of the right to vote on account of race contained in the Fifteenth Amendment, while passing some drastic measures to pre-empt its violation. As a result, seven of the eleven former Confederate states were covered in 1965 by special provisions to prevent a re-enactment 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 pre-clearance by federal authorities of any change affecting the voting process. In this paper, we assessed whether coverage was effective in changing the racial make-up 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 blacks, and the gradient of the relationship was clearly steeper for counties in covered states. We also find that pre-existing electoral rules played an important role. In particular, coverage led to larger gains in black office holding in states that elected county commissioners by single

member district, 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 pre-existing district-type elections, pre-clearance provided an effective tool to promote the journey towards 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 make-up of 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, 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. Second, as racial attitudes affect political behavior (Kuziemko and Washington 2018), another relevant issue is whether black office holding might have changed the way in which Southern whites cast their ballot leading to a polarization along racial lines. We leave both questions to further research.

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Table 1: OLS models. Dependent Variable: Change in Black Elected Officials (1964-1980)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Percent black, 1960 X Coverage	0.05** (0.023)	0.07** (0.036)	0.07* (0.037)	0.13*** (0.048)
Percent black, 1960	0.18*** (0.016)	0.22*** (0.023)	0.21*** (0.023)	0.19*** (0.021)
Unemployment rate (%), 1960		0.23* (0.130)	0.26** (0.129)	0.03 (0.080)
Percent of families below poverty line, 1960		-0.02 (0.028)	-0.02 (0.028)	-0.02 (0.019)
County population (thousands), 1960		0.00 (0.003)	-0.00 (0.002)	0.00 (0.002)
Percent unskilled, 1960		-0.04* (0.021)	-0.04* (0.021)	0.05 (0.037)
Percent urban, 1960		0.04*** (0.013)	0.03** (0.012)	0.02*** (0.007)
Agricultural productivity		0.42 (0.835)	0.29 (0.822)	-0.10 (0.515)
Pro-black protest, 1960-64			0.30*** (0.065)	0.38 (0.259)
Anti-black protest, 1960-64			-0.37 (0.312)	-1.39 (0.965)
State Trends	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Coverage X Controls	No	No	No	Yes
Adj. R-Square	0.45	0.50	0.51	0.52
N	1051	974	974	974

Robust standard errors clustered by county in parenthesis. ***, **, and * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% levels, respectively.

Table 2: OLS models. Dependent Variable: Change in Black Elected Officials (1964-1980)

	County Governments			Other Governments	
	Commission	Judiciary and Enforcement	Other	Municipality	School District
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<i>Panel A: Overall Sample</i>					
Percent black, 1960 X Coverage	0.100*** (0.024)	0.103*** (0.022)	0.057*** (0.017)	0.008 (0.039)	0.027 (0.054)
Percent black, 1960	0.048*** (0.009)	0.008 (0.005)	-0.000 (0.000)	0.148*** (0.025)	0.168*** (0.039)
State Trends	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls X Coverage	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Adj. R-Square	0.39	0.25	0.13	0.40	0.41
N	1022	1016	1019	982	846
<i>Panel B: Border Sample</i>					
Percent black, 1960 X Coverage	0.057** (0.027)	0.051*** (0.018)	0.010 (0.008)	0.022 (0.062)	0.122* (0.065)
Percent black, 1960	-0.051 (0.060)	0.036 (0.025)	0.010 (0.011)	0.200** (0.092)	0.109 (0.111)
County Pair Trends	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Adj. R-Square	0.47	0.26	-0.02	0.60	0.52
N	295	295	295	290	281

Robust standard errors clustered by county in parenthesis. Controls in Panel A are *Unemployment rate (%)*, 1960; *Percent of families below poverty line*, 1960; *Percent unskilled*, 1960; *Agricultural productivity*; *Population*, 1960; *Percent urban*, 1960; *Pro-black protest 1960-64*; *Anti-black protest, 1960-64*. ***, **, and * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% levels, respectively.

Table 3: OLS models. Dependent Variable: Change in Black Elected Officials, County Commission

	(1)	(2)
Percent black, 1960 X Coverage X SMD	0.103** (0.044)	0.139*** (0.028)
Percent black, 1960 X Coverage	0.042 (0.038)	
Percent black, 1960 X SMD	-0.029 (0.027)	
Percent black, 1960	0.071*** (0.025)	0.049*** (0.009)
Percent black, 1960 X Coverage X Switch		0.070** (0.034)
Percent black, 1960 X Coverage X Non-switch, Mixed		-0.004 (0.030)
Controls	Yes	Yes
Controls X Coverage	Yes	Yes
State Trends	Yes	Yes
Adj. R-Square	0.40	0.40
N	1022	1022

Robust standard errors clustered by county in parenthesis. Controls in columns (1) and (2) are: *Unemployment rate (%)*, 1960; *Percent of families below poverty line*, 1960; *Percent unskilled*, 1960; *Agricultural productivity*; *Population*, 1960; *Percent urban*, 1960; *Pro-black protest 1960-64*; *Anti-black protest, 1960-64*. ***, **, and * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% levels, respectively.

Table 4: OLS regressions. Dependent Variable: Change in Local Spending (1957-1982)

	Overall Sample		Border Sample		Placebo	
	(1) Current	(2) Capital	(3) Current	(4) Capital	(5) Current	(6) Capital
Percent black, 1960 X Coverage X SMD	-0.0034 (0.0038)	0.0355** (0.0147)	0.0018 (0.0054)	0.0378*** (0.0119)	0.0037 (0.0028)	0.0005 (0.0180)
Percent black, 1960 X Coverage	0.0011 (0.0029)	-0.0098 (0.0105)	-0.0039 (0.0034)	-0.0236*** (0.0080)	-0.0018 (0.0021)	0.0142 (0.0153)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls X Coverage	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Controls X Coverage X SMD	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
State Trends	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
County-Pair Trends	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Adj. R-Square	0.79	0.07	0.82	0.25	0.92	0.27
N	960	862	281	283	965	886

Robust standard errors clustered by county in parenthesis. Controls in columns (1)-(2) and (5)-(6): *Percent black, 1960; Percent black, 1960 X SMD; Unemployment rate (%), 1960; Percent of families below poverty line, 1960; Percent unskilled, 1960; Agricultural productivity; Population, 1960; Percent urban, 1960; Pro-black protest 1960-64; Anti-black protest, 1960-64*. Controls in columns (3)-(4): *Percent black, 1960; Percent black, 1960 X SMD*. ***, **, and * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% levels, respectively.

Table 5: OLS regressions. Dependent Variable: Change in Revenues (1957-1982)

	Overall Sample		Border Sample	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Intergovernmental Revenues	County Own Revenues	Intergovernmental Revenues	County Own Revenues
Percent black, 1960 X Coverage X SMD	0.0107** (0.0051)	-0.0033 (0.0052)	0.0116* (0.0070)	-0.0017 (0.0074)
Percent black, 1960 X Coverage	-0.0101** (0.0043)	0.0024 (0.0036)	-0.0204*** (0.0059)	-0.0006 (0.0055)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls X Coverage	Yes	Yes	No	No
Controls X Coverage X SMD	Yes	Yes	No	No
State Trends	Yes	Yes	No	No
County-Pair Trends	No	No	Yes	Yes
Adj. R-Square	0.69	0.74	0.62	0.77
N	976	975	291	291

Robust standard errors clustered by county in parenthesis. Controls in columns (1)-(3): *Percent black, 1960; Percent black, 1960 X SMD; Unemployment rate (%), 1960; Percent of families below poverty line, 1960; Percent unskilled, 1960; Agricultural productivity; Population, 1960; Percent urban, 1960; Pro-black protest 1960-64; Anti-black protest, 1960-64*. Controls in columns (3)-(4): *Percent black, 1960; Percent black, 1960 X SMD*. ***, **, and * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% levels, respectively.

A Appendix

Table A.1: Summary Statistics

	Covered		Not covered	
	Mean	St. Dev.	Mean	St. Dev.
<i>Local Black Elected Officials</i>				
All local officials (%), 1964	0.11	1.02	0.05	0.47
All local officials (%), 1980	7.03	11.41	2.16	4.93
Municipality (%), 1964	0.18	1.62	0.04	0.43
Municipality (%), 1980	5.35	9.39	1.91	4.83
School board (%), 1964	0.00	0.00	0.07	0.99
School board (%), 1980	5.81	11.60	1.40	5.30
County governments (%), 1964	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
County governments (%), 1980	4.09	11.56	0.61	2.03
County governing body (%), 1964	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
County governing body (%), 1980	2.26	5.51	0.47	1.81
Judiciary and Enforcement (%), 1964	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Judiciary and Enforcement (%), 1980	1.26	4.97	0.14	0.92
Other administrative body (%), 1964	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Other administrative body (%), 1980	0.42	2.84	0.00	0.00
<i>County Characteristics</i>				
Percent black, 1960	32.42	20.00	13.18	14.07
Unemployment rate (%), 1960	4.96	1.94	4.87	2.16
Percent of families below poverty line, 1960	46.15	16.18	43.67	14.94
Percent unskilled, 1960	73.87	8.68	70.74	9.60
County population (thousands), 1960	34.74	57.77	40.88	101.86
Percent urban, 1960	28.18	29.01	32.95	28.15
Agricultural productivity	0.26	0.23	0.59	0.44
Pro-black protest, 1960-64	1.09	5.67	0.54	3.19
Anti-black protest, 1960-64	0.30	2.04	0.05	0.49
Counties	512		538	

Figure A.1: Percent black, 1960

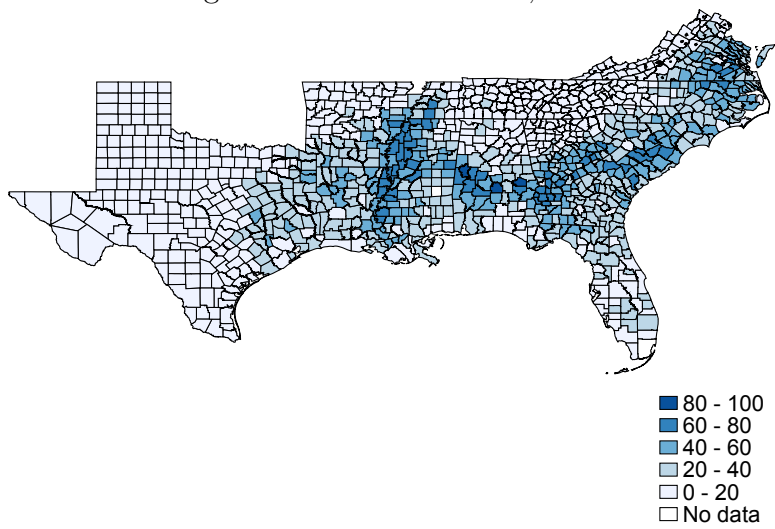


Table A.2: OLS models. Dependent Variable: Pre-VRA trends in civil right activism, political participation and racial attitudes

	NACCP (1)	Turnout (2)	KKK (3)	Percent Republican (4)
Percent black, 1960 X Coverage	-0.0022 (0.002)	0.0002 (0.001)	-0.0039 (0.005)	-0.0001 (0.001)
Percent black, 1960	0.0056*** (0.002)	0.0042*** (0.001)	0.0107** (0.004)	0.0072*** (0.001)
Percent urban, 1960	0.0009 (0.001)	0.0005** (0.000)	0.0051** (0.002)	0.0007 (0.001)
Unemployment rate (%), 1960	-0.0204** (0.008)	-0.0013 (0.003)	-0.0141 (0.021)	-0.0179*** (0.005)
Percent of families below poverty line, 1960	-0.0038* (0.002)	0.0016*** (0.001)	-0.0003 (0.004)	-0.0023* (0.001)
County population (thousands), 1960	-0.0002 (0.000)	0.0001 (0.000)	0.0017 (0.001)	-0.0002 (0.000)
Percent unskilled, 1960	0.0001 (0.002)	0.0014*** (0.000)	0.0006 (0.004)	0.0099*** (0.001)
Agricultural productivity	0.0669 (0.057)	-0.0238 (0.017)	-0.2207* (0.116)	0.0062 (0.036)
State Trends	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Adj. R-Square	0.30	0.79	0.30	0.87
N	1022	1022	1022	1022

Robust standard errors clustered by county in parenthesis. ***, **, and * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% levels, respectively.

Table A.3: OLS models. Common Support in 1960 percent Black. Dependent Variable: Change in Black Elected Officials (1964-1980)

	County Governments			Other Governments	
	Commission	Judiciary and Enforcement	Other	Municipality	School District
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Percent black, 1960 X Coverage X SMD	0.140*** (0.041)				
Percent black, 1960 X Coverage	-0.015 (0.030)	0.031*** (0.011)	0.006 (0.004)	-0.024 (0.037)	-0.006 (0.058)
Percent black, 1960 X SMD	-0.016 (0.028)				
Percent black, 1960	0.067*** (0.025)	0.009 (0.006)	-0.000 (0.000)	0.160*** (0.027)	0.177*** (0.040)
State Trends	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Coverage X Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Adj. R-Square	0.43	0.26	0.01	0.41	0.40
N	945	940	942	902	774

Robust standard errors clustered by county in parenthesis. The sample consists of counties with percent blacks in 1960 above the 10th percentile of the distribution of non-covered counties (2 percent) and below the maximum value in the non-covered sample (68 percent) corresponding to the 96th percentile of the covered sample distribution. Controls: *Unemployment rate (%)*, 1960; *Percent of families below poverty line*, 1960; *Percent unskilled*, 1960; *Agricultural productivity*; *Population*, 1960; *Percent urban*, 1960; *Pro-black protest 1960-64*; *Anti-black protest, 1960-64*. ***, **, and * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% levels, respectively.

Table A.4: Summary Statistics

	Covered		Not covered	
	Mean	St. Dev.	Mean	St. Dev.
<i>Local Expenditure, percapita (real 2000 dollars)</i>				
Total expenditure, 1957	243.79	158.86	272.62	195.97
Total expenditure, 1982	582.53	422.08	581.58	611.90
Current expenditure, 1957	196.42	123.09	226.95	157.42
Current expenditure, 1982	528.55	392.09	528.25	568.20
Capital expenditure, 1957	49.70	59.76	50.26	62.38
Capital expenditure, 1982	58.27	79.37	54.61	68.96
<i>ln Local expenditure, percapita (real 2000 dollars)</i>				
ln Total expenditure, 1957	5.31	0.62	5.39	0.66
ln Total expenditure, 1982	6.12	0.71	6.04	0.82
ln Current expenditure, 1957	5.09	0.63	5.21	0.65
ln Current expenditure, 1982	6.01	0.73	5.93	0.84
ln Capital expenditure, 1957	3.25	1.31	3.31	1.22
ln Capital expenditure, 1982	3.39	1.25	3.40	1.20

Table A.5: OLS models. Dependent Variable: Change in Black Elected Officials (1964-1980), by County Commission Election Rule

	Commission (1)	Municipality and School District (2)
<i>Panel A: Overall Sample</i>		
Percent black, 1960 X Coverage X SMD	0.103** (0.044)	0.073 (0.124)
Percent black, 1960 X Coverage	0.042 (0.038)	0.041 (0.116)
State Trends	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes
Controls X Coverage	Yes	Yes
Adj. R-Square	0.40	0.46
N	1022	853
<i>Panel B: Border Sample</i>		
Percent black, 1960 X Coverage X SMD	0.094* (0.048)	0.166 (0.119)
Percent black, 1960 X Coverage	0.020 (0.017)	-0.060 (0.082)
County Pair Trends	Yes	Yes
Adj. R-Square	0.53	0.66
N	295	241

Robust standard errors clustered by county in parenthesis. Controls in Panel A are *Unemployment rate (%)*, 1960; *Percent of families below poverty line*, 1960; *Percent unskilled*, 1960; *Agricultural productivity*; *Population*, 1960; *Percent urban*, 1960; *Pro-black protest 1960-64*; *Anti-black protest, 1960-64*. ***, **, and * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% levels, respectively.

Variable definitions and sources

Black elected officials.

Share of black elected officials by type of office: number of black elected officials in county governing bodies, municipalities, and school boards, as reported by the National Roster of Black Elected Officials, divided by the total number of elected officials for the corresponding offices at county level, as reported by the Census of Governments. 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 National Roster of Black Elected Officials in 1969, 1971, and for the period 1973-1980. These officials have been matched to the counties using the address provided by the Roster. The information on the total number of elected officials by type of office that is used to construct the share of black elected officials is only available from the Census of Governments in 1967 and 1977. Thus, for the period 1964-1972, the total number of elected officials by type of office are taken from the Census of Governments, Volume 1, Governmental Organization, Number 2, Popularly Elected Officials, 1967. For the period 1973-1982, elected officials by type of office are taken from the Census of Governments Volume 1, Governmental Organization, Number 2, Popularly Elected Officials, 1977.

Local public finances: Expenditures.

Real (2000 USD) county government expenditure per capita: Expenditure figures (total, current, and capital) have been digitized from the Census of Government 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 dividing the nominal figures by the county population and converting them in 2000 USD using the CPI index. *Capital expenditure* consists of direct expenditure for contract or force account construction of buildings, roads, and other improvements, and purchase of equipment, land, and existing structures, and for 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 consist of payments for support of and assistance to needy persons contingent upon their need.

Real (2000 USD) expenditure per capita for local governments other than county govern-

ments: Expenditure figures (total, current, and capital) for local government other than county governments have been obtained by subtracting county government expenditures from county areas expenditures. The latter consists of all county level expenditures by local governments (e.g. 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 Government Historical Database available at five-year intervals starting from 1957 at: <ftp://ftp2.census.gov/pub/outgoing/govs/special60>. The data for expenditure figures (total, 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 dividing the nominal figures by the county population and converting them in 2000 USD using the CPI index.

Local public finances: Revenues.

Real (2000 USD) county government revenues per capita by source: Own revenues and intergovernmental revenues have been obtained from the Census of Government Historical Database available at <ftp://ftp2.census.gov/pub/outgoing/govs/special60>, at five-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 revenue 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 in 2000 USD using the CPI index.

Coverage.

Dummy variable equal to one for the counties that were covered by Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 and zero otherwise. The counties of six states (Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Virginia) were all covered, whereas, of the 100 North Carolina counties, 39 were covered. Arkansas, Florida, Tennessee, and Texas were

instead not covered. The North Carolina counties covered in 1965 are the following: 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>.

County characteristics.

Percent black, 1960: percent black in the 1960 county population is from the County and City Data Book Consolidated File, County Data 1947-1977 (U.S. Department of Commerce 1978).

Population, 1960: the county population is from the County and City Data Book Consolidated File, County Data 1947-1977 (U.S. Department of Commerce 1978).

Unemployment rate, 1960: county unemployment rate is from the County and City Data Book Consolidated File, County Data 1947-1977 (U.S. Department of Commerce 1978).

Percent of families below poverty line, 1960: percentage of families with income less than 3,000 USD in 1960 is from the County and City Data Book Consolidated File, County Data 1947-1977 (U.S. Department of Commerce 1978).

Percent unskilled, 1960: county percentage of 25 years old or more without a high school diploma in 1960 is from the County and City Data Book Consolidated File, County Data 1947-1977 (U.S. Department of Commerce 1978).

Percent urban, 1960: county percentage of urban population in 1960 is from the County and City Data Book Consolidated File, County Data 1947-1977 (U.S. Department of Commerce 1978).

Pro-black protest, 1960-64: counts of pro-black events 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 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 National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), by county, between 1940 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 Ku Klux Klan organizations (known as Klaverns) by county. Information on the location of Klan organizations has been obtained from two sources. For the year 1940, 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 headquarter (in a latitude and longitude format), 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' (pp. 145-163), which reports information on active Klaverns between 1964-1966.

Presidential turnout: difference in the natural log of presidential turnout in 1964 and 1952, where presidential turnout is given by the votes cast in the 1964 and 1952 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, ICPSR00013-v2. The data on population of voting age are from the Minnesota Population Center, National Historical Geographic Information System.

Percent republican: 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, ICPSR00013-v2.

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

Election rule of county governing bodies.

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 National Roster of Black Elected Officials (NRBEO, 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 Government (1957) and the NRBEO (1980) at state level to construct indicators for the system of elections of county governing bodies as detailed below.

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

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

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

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