

Homefront: Black Servicemembers and Black Voters in the Civil Rights Era

Thomas Koch, Trevon D. Logan, and John Parman
FTC, The Ohio State University, and William and Mary

January 2021

The Question

- What is the effect of Black service in WWII on Black political mobilization?

The Question

- What is the effect of Black service in WWII on Black political mobilization?
- Narrative literature – Black participation in WWII is related to Civil Rights leadership

The Question

- What is the effect of Black service in WWII on Black political mobilization?
- Narrative literature – Black participation in WWII is related to Civil Rights leadership
- American Political Development literature – Surveys show Black veterans were politically active

The Question

- What is the effect of Black service in WWII on Black political mobilization?
- Narrative literature – Black participation in WWII is related to Civil Rights leadership
- American Political Development literature – Surveys show Black veterans were politically active
- Economics literature – Exploits policy variability of Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA) borders

- Combines detailed data on WWII enlistment by race with Civil Rights Commission (CCR) data on voter registration by race to estimate the effect of Black WWII enlistment on black voter registration
- Both event study and Difference-in-Differences estimates show that counties with larger Black WWII enlistment had greater Black voter registration after VRA.

- Combines detailed data on WWII enlistment by race with Civil Rights Commission (CCR) data on voter registration by race to estimate the effect of Black WWII enlistment on black voter registration
- Both event study and Difference-in-Differences estimates show that counties with larger Black WWII enlistment had greater Black voter registration after VRA.

Preview of Findings – Black Veterans and Black Voter Registration

- The Key Findings:

Preview of Findings – Black Veterans and Black Voter Registration

- The Key Findings:
 - 1 Counties with more Black WWII enlistees had significantly higher black voter registration post VRA

Preview of Findings – Black Veterans and Black Voter Registration

- The Key Findings:
 - ① Counties with more Black WWII enlistees had significantly higher black voter registration post VRA
 - ② Each additional Black WWII enlistee resulted in > 2 additional black registered voters.

Preview of Findings – Black Veterans and Black Voter Registration

- The Key Findings:
 - 1 Counties with more Black WWII enlistees had significantly higher black voter registration post VRA
 - 2 Each additional Black WWII enlistee resulted in > 2 additional black registered voters.
 - 3 Cross-sectional results show that Black enlistees were related to both black political activism and white backlash

Narrative of Black Veterans

- The narrative of the Civil Rights Movement establishes that black veterans played key roles in the Civil Rights Movement (Morris 1984, Payne 1995, Tyson 1999, Klinkner and Smith 1999).

Narrative of Black Veterans

- The narrative of the Civil Rights Movement establishes that black veterans played key roles in the Civil Rights Movement (Morris 1984, Payne 1995, Tyson 1999, Klinkner and Smith 1999).
- Salient examples abound: Evers, Moore, Brown, etc.

Narrative of Black Veterans

- The narrative of the Civil Rights Movement establishes that black veterans played key roles in the Civil Rights Movement (Morris 1984, Payne 1995, Tyson 1999, Klinkner and Smith 1999).
- Salient examples abound: Evers, Moore, Brown, etc.
- What is less well researched is whether this military service played a causal role in political outcomes, and how to think about what such a role would be.

Some Fundamental Identification Problems

- Research on high-risk political participation, voting, has been linked to black military service (Parker 2009a)

Some Fundamental Identification Problems

- Research on high-risk political participation, voting, has been linked to black military service (Parker 2009a)
- We do not know how to disentangle those results from general changes in black political participation (Cascio and Washington 2014).

Data on Black Military Service

Sources

- The US Army enlistment records for World War II have been made available by the National Archives Administration (NARA).

Data on Black Military Service

Sources

- The US Army enlistment records for World War II have been made available by the National Archives Administration (NARA).
- Upon entry of each soldier, the US Army filed a punch card with the soldier's information: name, serial number, state and county of residence, date of enlistment, and occupation prior to joining the Army, among other information.

Data on Black Military Service

Sources

- The US Army enlistment records for World War II have been made available by the National Archives Administration (NARA).
- Upon entry of each soldier, the US Army filed a punch card with the soldier's information: name, serial number, state and county of residence, date of enlistment, and occupation prior to joining the Army, among other information.
- These serial numbers were not assigned randomly; depending on which Corps the enlistee was assigned determined the range of the numbers which could identify the person.

Data on Black Military Service

Sources

- The US Army enlistment records for World War II have been made available by the National Archives Administration (NARA).
- Upon entry of each soldier, the US Army filed a punch card with the soldier's information: name, serial number, state and county of residence, date of enlistment, and occupation prior to joining the Army, among other information.
- These serial numbers were not assigned randomly; depending on which Corps the enlistee was assigned determined the range of the numbers which could identify the person.
- Of particular importance, all the volunteers were given serial numbers beginning with a 0, 1, or 2. After the Service Training and Selective Service Act of 1940 was enacted, the newly conscripted enlistees were given serial numbers beginning with a 3 or a 4.

Data on Black Military Service

Sources

- In addition to being able to differentiate the volunteers from the draftees through the serial numbers, the punch cards also recorded the race and the state and county of origin for the enlisted. This information allows us to construct a county-level data of the enlisted by race and by enlistment status (i.e. drafted or volunteered).

Data on Black Military Service

Sources

- In addition to being able to differentiate the volunteers from the draftees through the serial numbers, the punch cards also recorded the race and the state and county of origin for the enlisted. This information allows us to construct a county-level data of the enlisted by race and by enlistment status (i.e. drafted or volunteered).
- Overall mobilization varied at state level between 40 and 55 percent (Acemoglu and Lyle 2004), but the variation within states was substantial and driven by a number of idiosyncratic factors.

Data on Black Military Service

Sources

- In addition to being able to differentiate the volunteers from the draftees through the serial numbers, the punch cards also recorded the race and the state and county of origin for the enlisted. This information allows us to construct a county-level data of the enlisted by race and by enlistment status (i.e. drafted or volunteered).
- Overall mobilization varied at state level between 40 and 55 percent (Acemoglu and Lyle 2004), but the variation within states was substantial and driven by a number of idiosyncratic factors.
- Since military enlistment was driven by state-level quotas for men, draft boards varied in their application of recruitment criteria, and estimates at the time are that one fifth of the eligible male population would serve in the war, the random nature of county level variation in black military service is well established.

Data on Black Voter Registration

- The Civil Rights Act of 1957 created the Civil Rights Commission (CCR) to investigate, report and make recommendations regarding civil rights in the US.

Data on Black Voter Registration

- The Civil Rights Act of 1957 created the Civil Rights Commission (CCR) to investigate, report and make recommendations regarding civil rights in the US.
- Among its many activities, the Commission produced three reports regarding the political and voting rights of African Americans in the US South. These reports collected and reported voter registration counts for various states, by county and race.

Data on Black Voter Registration

- The voter registration counts were reported for some, but not all, southern states in all three reports, and inconsistently over time for others.

Data on Black Voter Registration

- The voter registration counts were reported for some, but not all, southern states in all three reports, and inconsistently over time for others.
- The 1959 and 1961 reports list the registration counts for the previous year, while the 1968 report lists the counts for 1965 (i.e., before the passage and enforcement of the 1965 Voting Rights Act) and 1968 (after the Act's passage and enforcement).

Data on Black Voter Registration

- The voter registration counts were reported for some, but not all, southern states in all three reports, and inconsistently over time for others.
- The 1959 and 1961 reports list the registration counts for the previous year, while the 1968 report lists the counts for 1965 (i.e., before the passage and enforcement of the 1965 Voting Rights Act) and 1968 (after the Act's passage and enforcement).
- We provide estimates for a wide array of samples and including state fixed effects, to ensure that whatever patterns we find are not an artifact of inconsistent data availability.

- In order to construct voter registration rates by race, we divide by the population eligible to vote by race in each county and year. The denominator is calculated from the 1960 and 1970 Census tabulations

- In order to construct voter registration rates by race, we divide by the population eligible to vote by race in each county and year. The denominator is calculated from the 1960 and 1970 Census tabulations
- The Commission reports made similar attempts to appropriately scale the voter registration counts, and we also provide specifications based on those numbers.

County Level Political Data

- We include a variety of measures on civil rights activism constructed in Matthews and Prothro (1963) and later used in Cascio and Washington (2014).

County Level Political Data

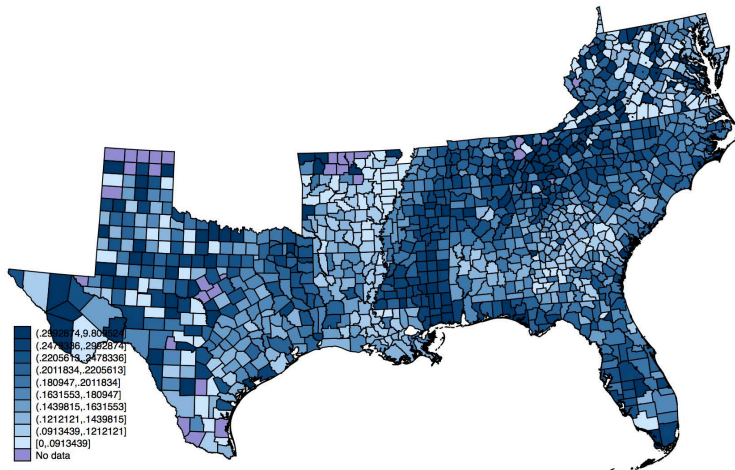
- We include a variety of measures on civil rights activism constructed in Matthews and Prothro (1963) and later used in Cascio and Washington (2014).
- This data is useful along two dimensions. First, the data include county-by-county voter registration counts by race. This allows us to match the county measures to the counties in the CCR reports. This validates the county identifiers in the former data.

County Level Political Data

- We include a variety of measures on civil rights activism constructed in Matthews and Prothro (1963) and later used in Cascio and Washington (2014).
- This data is useful along two dimensions. First, the data include county-by-county voter registration counts by race. This allows us to match the county measures to the counties in the CCR reports. This validates the county identifiers in the former data.
- Second, Matthews and Prothro report other county-level measures of political participation and conflict. These include the presence of a white-identity political group, NAACP presence, other black political group presence and whether there was a violent racial incident in the county.

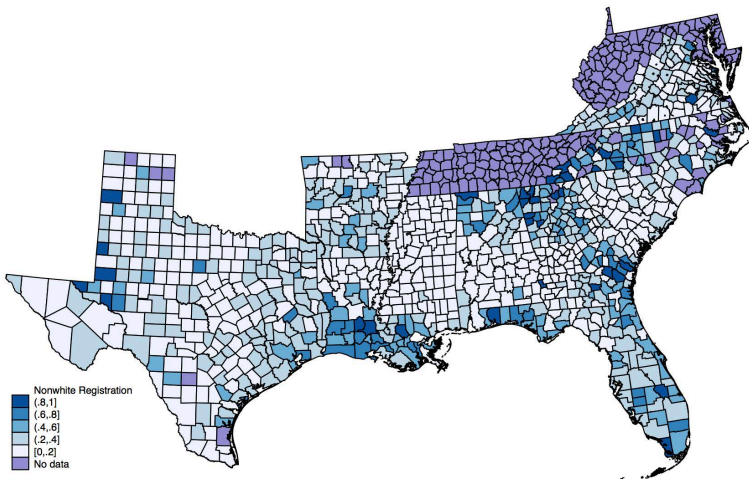
County Level Black Enlistment

Black WWII Enlistment



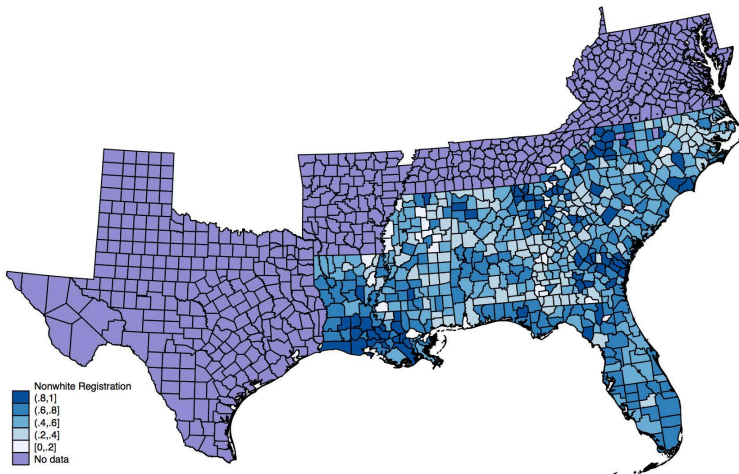
1958 Black Voter Registration

Nonwhite Voter Registration in 1958



1968 Black Voter Registration

Nonwhite Voter Registration in 1968



Empirical Strategy

- Our empirical approach is a difference-in-differences specification which exploits county-level variation in enlistment by race and pre/post timing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Empirical Strategy

- Our empirical approach is a difference-in-differences specification which exploits county-level variation in enlistment by race and pre/post timing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.
- Since the VRA was a national policy and unrelated to county-level variation in Black WWII enlistment, the estimates from such an approach identify the impact of additional black enlistments on black voter registration after the VRA (dosing estimate)

Empirical Strategy

- Our empirical approach is a difference-in-differences specification which exploits county-level variation in enlistment by race and pre/post timing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.
- Since the VRA was a national policy and unrelated to county-level variation in Black WWII enlistment, the estimates from such an approach identify the impact of additional black enlistments on black voter registration after the VRA (dosing estimate)
- Estimate $R_{i,t} = \alpha + \beta \text{Enlistments}_i * (\text{PostVRA})_t + \Gamma_t + \theta_i + \epsilon_{i,s}$ where R is black voter registration for year t in county i . We include time fixed effects Γ to account for unobservable factors that vary across time, but not counties, in addition to county fixed effects θ to control for time-invariant unobservable factors that vary across counties. The coefficient of interest, β , measures the differential change in the number of black voter registrations after the VRA attributable to additional black enlistments.

- Identification relies on assumptions that underlie the difference-in-differences framework:

- Identification relies on assumptions that underlie the difference-in-differences framework:
- Counties with low levels of black enlistments must share a common support with counties with high levels of enlistment.

- Identification relies on several assumptions that underlie the difference-in-differences framework:

- Identification relies on several assumptions that underlie the difference-in-differences framework:
- Second to interpret β as the causal effect of black enlistment on the growth of black voter registration is that there cannot have been any anticipation effects wherein black voter registration started increasing prior to World War II enlistments.

- Identification relies on several assumptions that underlie the difference-in-differences framework:

- Identification relies on several assumptions that underlie the difference-in-differences framework:
- Third is the parallel trends assumption, which states simply that in the absence of World War II all counties would have experienced the same growth in black registration, regardless of their level of black enlistments. Since this assumption refers to a hypothetical, we cannot formally test it; however, we can estimate an additional specification that lends support to the credibility of the assumption where we replace the interaction of enlistments and the indicator for being observed in the post-VRA period with a set of interactions between the enlistment rate and each year (an event study).

- We also estimate the effect of exposure to World War II by looking at the relationship between drafted service counts in a county and the subsequent voter registration counts by race. Because there was substantial volunteering to serve in World War II (and this might influence the number of men left to be drafted in a particular area), we instrument for drafted Black service counts using Black volunteer service.

DiD Estimates

Results – Table 2

Dependent Variable	Non-White Reg.	Non-White Reg
Black WWII Enlistees	2.923*** (0.457)	
Post VRA	21.92 (275.9)	-124.4* (70.99)
WWII*PostVRA	1.931*** (0.734)	2.334*** (0.0675)
County FE		X

Interpretation

Effects on Black Voting

- A county moving from the 25th to the 50th percentile in Black WWII enlistees would have between 268 and 324 additional Black registered voters

Interpretation

Effects on Black Voting

- A county moving from the 25th to the 50th percentile in Black WWII enlistees would have between 268 and 324 additional Black registered voters
- Relative to a median of 1,602 Black voter registrations, this is more than a 16% increase in black voter registration.

Event Study Specification

Dependent Variable	Non-White Registration
1960	-66.04 (290.9)
1965	192.3 (232.2)
1968	-416.3 (288.1)
Black WII Enlistees	2.457*** (0.458)
1960*Enlistees	0.909 (0.878)
1965*Enlistees	0.812 (0.675)
1968*Enlistees	4.219*** (0.721)

Possible Mechanisms

Exploiting Within-State Variation

- Parker (2009) and others have shown that Black WWII veterans

Possible Mechanisms

Exploiting Within-State Variation

- Parker (2009) and others have shown that Black WWII veterans
- White (2016, 2019) has shown that white WWII veterans did not have as progressive attitudes on racial equality as has been argued.

Possible Mechanisms

Exploiting Within-State Variation

- Parker (2009) and others have shown that Black WWII veterans
- White (2016, 2019) has shown that white WWII veterans did not have as progressive attitudes on racial equality as has been argued.
- We can test to see if the presence of Black WWII enlistees was related to political mobilization and/or white backlash

Regression Estimates

Results

Dependent Variable	NAACP Office	Other Black Org	Black Officeholder
Black WWII Enlistees	0.00017*** (0.00003)	0.00011*** (0.00001)	0.0002*** (0.00005)
State Fixed Effects	X	X	X
Sample Mean	0.266	0.03	0.82

Regression Estimates

Results

Dependent Variable	White Race Org	Violent Acts	Wallace Votes 1968
Black WWII Enlistees	0.00011*** (0.00002)	0.00032*** (0.00003)	742.3*** (66.81)
State Fixed Effects	X	X	X
Sample Mean	0.198	0.143	447317

Black Veterans and Black Voting

- These preliminary results suggest that black voter registration was positively related to Black WWII enlistment

Black Veterans and Black Voting

- These preliminary results suggest that black voter registration was positively related to Black WWII enlistment
- The effect is substantively large, each additional enlistee resulting in >2 Black registrations post VRA

Black Veterans and Black Voting

- These preliminary results suggest that black voter registration was positively related to Black WWII enlistment
- The effect is substantively large, each additional enlistee resulting in >2 Black registrations post VRA
- Black WWII enlistees were positively related to both measures of Black political organization and white backlash

- More needs to be done to check on migratory patterns, other threats to validity for DiD

- More needs to be done to check on migratory patterns, other threats to validity for DiD
- Matching the 1950 and 1960 Census data on veteran status (will be incomplete)

Black Veterans

Future Directions

- More needs to be done to check on migratory patterns, other threats to validity for DiD
- Matching the 1950 and 1960 Census data on veteran status (will be incomplete)
- Significant investment in literature on 1940 onward black political organizing and membership

What's Next

Future Directions

- More on the mechanisms of how Black veterans were active in voter registration in particular (narrative sources)

What's Next

Future Directions

- More on the mechanisms of how Black veterans were active in voter registration in particular (narrative sources)
- Thinking through the channels of what military service meant as a predictor of political involvement for Blacks

What's Next

Future Directions

- More on the mechanisms of how Black veterans were active in voter registration in particular (narrative sources)
- Thinking through the channels of what military service meant as a predictor of political involvement for Blacks
- Different forms of patriotic activism that are initiated by military service during conflict