

Historical Lynchings and the Contemporary Voting Behavior of Blacks

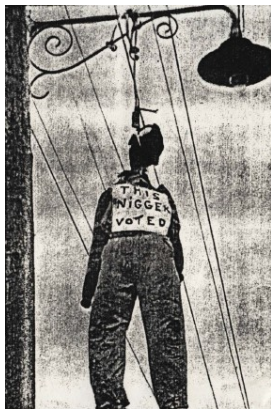
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Motivation

- Foundational Model of Voting:
 - Vote if benefit of voting $>$ cost of voting (Downs 1957):
- Recent Empirical Findings:
 - Voting is due to social image (DellaVigna et al. 2017)
 - Voting is habit forming (Gerber 2003; Fujiwara et al. 2016)
 - Intergenerational transmission of voting behavior (Akee et al. 2018)

Motivation



Research Question

- **Claim:** Voting is an area to be studied in cultural economics
- **Question:** Is there a link between historical racial animus and the contemporary voting behavior of blacks?
- **Research Design:** Use historical lynchings to index racial animus

Historical Background

- Reconstruction Act of 1867 changed the voting population in the South (DuBois 1935)
 - 1,000,000 blacks were given the right to vote
 - 300,000 illiterate, poor whites were given the right vote
- Union army commanders sought to protect manhood suffrage
 - Freedmen's Bureau "*advised Negroes about registration and voting and disabused their minds of fears of taxation or military service or reenslavement*" (DuBois 1935)

Historical Background

- Voter turnout was nearly 90% (Dickerson 2003)
- Black men voted for white and black politicians (Redding 2003)
- Black State Delegates
 - 61% in South Carolina
 - 50% in Louisiana
 - 40% in Florida



Historical Background

- Blalock's Political Threat Hypothesis (1967)
 - Dominant group believes their political authority is being tested by subordinate group
 - Violence aroused to suppress the black vote (Price et al. 2008)
 - The KKK killed more than 2,000 blacks in Louisiana, two South Carolina legislators, and the President of the Union League
 - Voter turnout among blacks was reduced by 20 percent

Historical Background

- “But I just decided it was time a few people got put on notice. As long as I live and can do anything about it, niggers are gonna stay in their place. Niggers ain’t gonna vote where I live. If they did, they’d control the government.” (J. W. Milam)

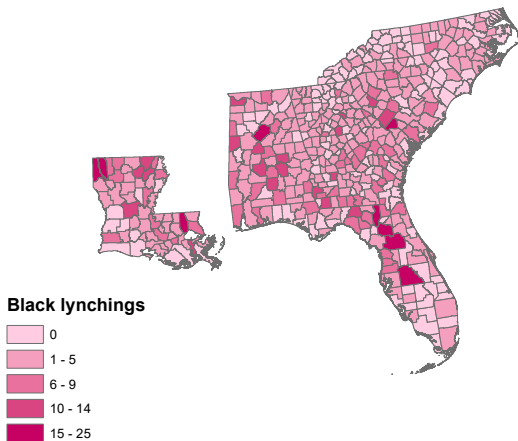


Conceptual Framework

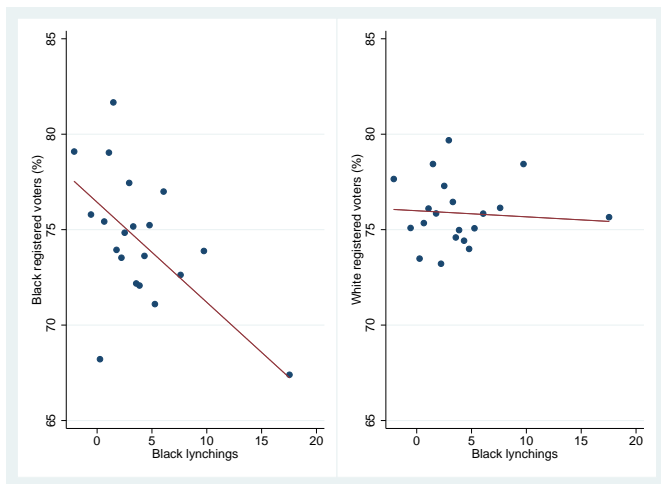
- Builds on existing voting models and cultural anthropology (Nunn and Wantchekon 2011)
- Vote if benefit of voting $>$ cost voting (Downs 1957)
 - Logistical cost (Ashworth 2011)
 - Information cost (Charles and Stephens 2011)
- Cost of voting is high \implies “rules-of-thumb” develop \implies culture of fear/norms of voter apathy
- Lynchings successfully changed behavioral patterns among blacks
- Cultural norms were transmitted to subsequent generations (Akee et al. 2018)

- Historical Data (county-level)
 - Lynchings: The Historical American Lynching Data Collection Project 1882-1930
 - Average farm value, Proportion of small farms, Proportion of free blacks: 1860 Census
 - Land inequality: Nunn (2008)
 - Number of newspapers: 1840 Census
 - County formation: Grosjean (2014)
- Contemporary Data (county-level)
 - Black (white) registered voters: 2000/04/08/12 Secretary of State Office (AL, FL, GA, LA, NC, and SC)
 - Black (white) voting-age population: 2000/04/08/12 Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results Program

Map of Black Lynchings



Lynchings and Political Participation

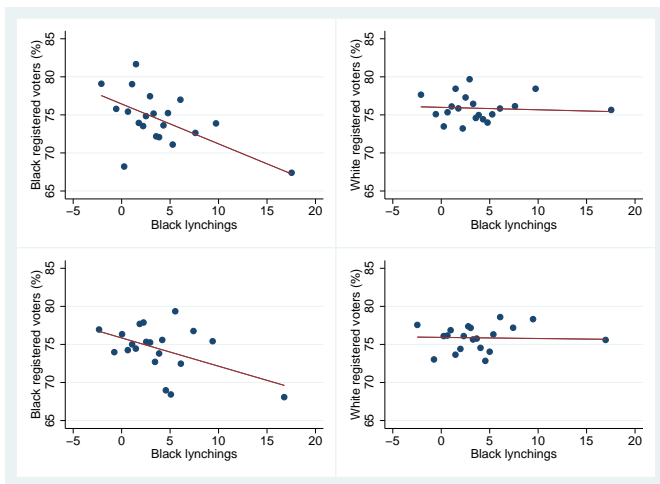


Note: Historical controls only

Potential Confounders

- Proportion of blacks (whites) w/ some college experience: 2000 Census
- Monthly earnings of blacks (whites): 2000/04/08/12 Census Bureau QWI
- Median age of blacks (whites): 2000 Census
- Proportion married: 2000 Census
- Republican party dominance: 2000/04/08/12 David Leip's Atlas
- Incarceration rates of blacks: 2010 Vera Institute of Justice
- Number of polling places: 2000/04/08/12 Secretary of State Office
- Proportion of slaves: 1860 Census

Lynchings and Political Participation



Note: Row 1 contains historical controls. Row 2 contains historical and contemporary controls.

Conclusion

- Low voter registration rates of blacks can be traced back to historical lynchings in counties
 - Unlikely to be driven by
 - Republican party dominance
 - Incarceration rates of blacks
 - Institutions that remained after slavery
 - Geographic sorting
 - Contemporary barriers to voting
- Policy implications:
 - Higher levels of black church members weakens relationship
 - Key provision of Voting Rights Act should be reinstated?

THANK YOU