

Waves of Empowerment: Black Radio and the Civil Rights Movement

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Motivation

- ▶ The civil rights movement ushered in one of America's most important breakthroughs in racial equality and justice [link](#)
- ▶ Black radio – then a new format aiming specifically at a Black audience – were broadcasting across the South
- ▶ Focused on music, but also disseminated civil rights messages
- ▶ Martin Luther King, Jr.: African Americans “were almost totally dependent on radio” to relate to society at large
- ▶ Yet, little empirical evidence on Black radio’s impacts

This Paper

- ▶ I examine Black radio's impacts on the civil rights movement
 - ▶ Black political participation and empowerment in the South
- ▶ Collected novel data measuring exposure to Black radio
 - ▶ Predicted radio signal strength across counties
- ▶ Exploits plausibly exogenous variation in radio signal resulting from idiosyncratic topography
 - ▶ Uncorrelated with past county characteristics or Black activism
- ▶ First empirical evidence on Black radio's impacts on the civil rights movement

Preview of Results

Baseline: Black radio facilitated Black political participation in the early 1960s

- ▶ ↑ Black voter registration
- ▶ ↑ presence of NAACP chapters

Potential mechanisms: Black radio program likely

- ▶ Increased the reach of civil rights groups
- ▶ Provided positive role models to the Black community

Consequences: Greater economic and political gains

- ▶ ↑ state aid transfers
- ▶ ↑ Southern congressmen's support for civil rights bills

Black Radio: Historical Background

- ▶ Black radio stations emerged in the late-1940s
- ▶ Located in large cities, almost all White-owned, focused on music and other programming for Black audience
- ▶ Civil rights activists often spoke on stations
- ▶ Southern Black radio ownership almost universal by 1960
- ▶ Rated highest by African Americans in empathy, honesty, objectivity, and entertainment among all media

Data

- ▶ Novel data on Black radio stations
 - ▶ Transmitter location, power, and frequency from *Sponsor* magazine (1960) location signal data
 - ▶ Predicted radio signal strengths across counties
- ▶ **Main outcomes:**
 1. County-level Black voter registered (%) in 1960
 2. Presence of NAACP local chapters over time
- ▶ **County control variables:**
 - ▶ Socioeconomic variables from 1940-1950 Censuses
 - ▶ Local geography: elevation and ruggedness
 - ▶ Strom Thurmond's 1948 vote share and pre-1930 lynching
 - ▶ NAACP presence and membership in 1942

Empirical Strategy

- ▶ **Main concern:** Black radio stations not randomly located
 - ▶ Though almost all owned by southern White businessmen
- ▶ I exploit residual variation in radio signal due to **idiosyncratic topographic factors**
 - ▶ Pioneered by Olken (2009), also used by Yanagizawa-Drott (2014), DellaVigna et al. (2014), and Durante et al. (2019)

Baseline Specification

$$Y_c = \beta BlackSignal_c + \gamma SignalFree_c + \delta' X_c + \eta_s + \epsilon_c \quad (1)$$

- ▶ Y_c : Black voter registration rate (%) in county c in 1960
- ▶ $BlackSignal_c$: Black radio signal strength in county c
- ▶ $SignalFree_c$: Black radio signal in the absence of topography
- ▶ X_c : preexisting county geographic, socioeconomic, white racial attitudes, and Black activism controls
- ▶ η_s : State Economic Area (SEA) fixed effects
- ▶ Standard errors clustered at the station level
- ▶ Signal strengths standardized

balance test

placebo test

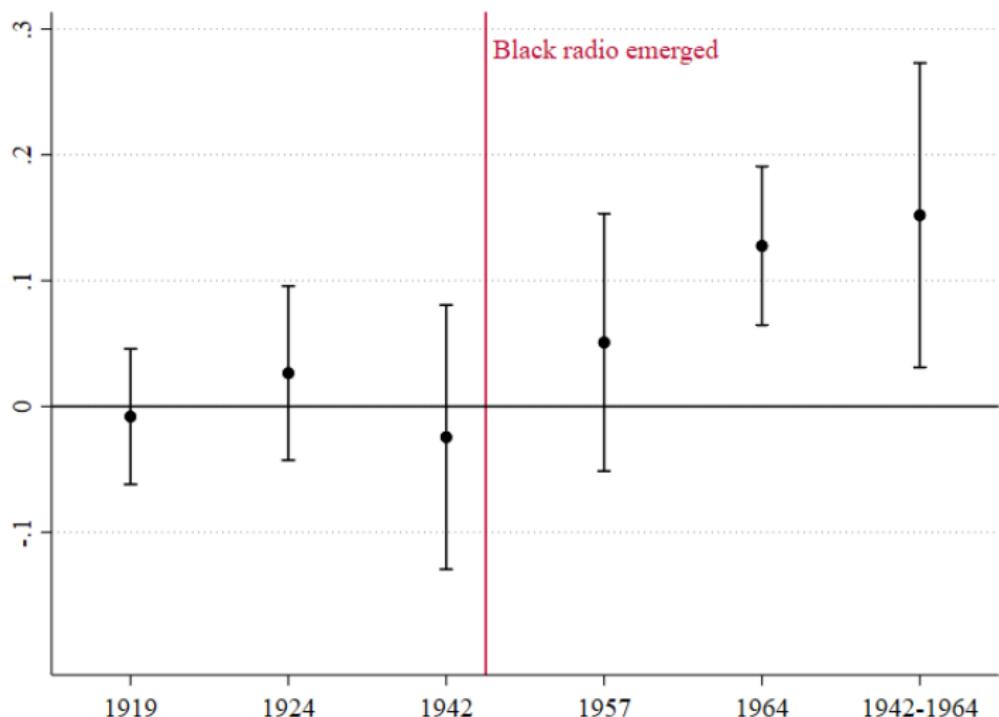
Baseline Results

Table 1: Black Radio and Voter Registration, 1960

	% Black Voting-Age Population Registered to Vote, 1960					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Black Radio Signal	4.921** (2.379)	4.878* (2.697)	5.451* (2.738)	5.507*** (1.709)	6.797*** (1.664)	4.075*** (1.432)
Observations	1,037	1,037	1,000	860	835	835
R-squared	0.471	0.471	0.526	0.608	0.624	0.702
State Econ Area FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
SignalFree	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Local Geography		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Socioeconomics			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Black Characteristics				Yes	Yes	Yes
Past Race Attitudes and Activism					Yes	Yes
Black Population Weighted						Yes
Mean of Dep. Var.	28.88	28.88	28.87	28.47	28.32	28.32
Std. Dev. of Dep. Var.	24.28	24.28	24.26	23.33	23.47	23.47

other

Effects on the presence of NAACP local chapters



Potential mechanisms

- ▶ Individual survey data from the early 1960s (Matthews and Prothro, 1966)
- ▶ Black radio might have made African Americans
 - ▶ more familiar with and supportive of NAACP
 - ▶ less likely to hold racial stereotypes

results

Did Black radio lead to concrete economic and political gains?

- ▶ I explore consequences of exposure to Black radio:

$$Y_c = Signal_c \times Black_c + Signal_c + Black_c + X_c + \eta_s + \epsilon_c \quad (2)$$

Outcomes:

1. State-to-county aid transfers (Cascio and Washington, 2014)
2. Southern Congressmen's support for civil rights bills (i.e., second dimension of DW-NOMINATE score)

- ▶ Results suggest Black radio increased both measures

transfer

congressmen

Conclusion

- ▶ Black radio facilitated Black political participation in the civil rights movement
 - ▶ 1 s.d. increase in exposure ↑ Black voter registration by 4 p.p.
(≈ 14% of mean)
 - ▶ Increased presence of NAACP chapters
- ▶ Translated to substantive economic and political gains for the Southern Black community
- ▶ Black radio had an impact even before the enactment of landmark civil rights legislation

Thank You

Any comments or suggestions: tianyi.wang@pitt.edu

APPENDIX

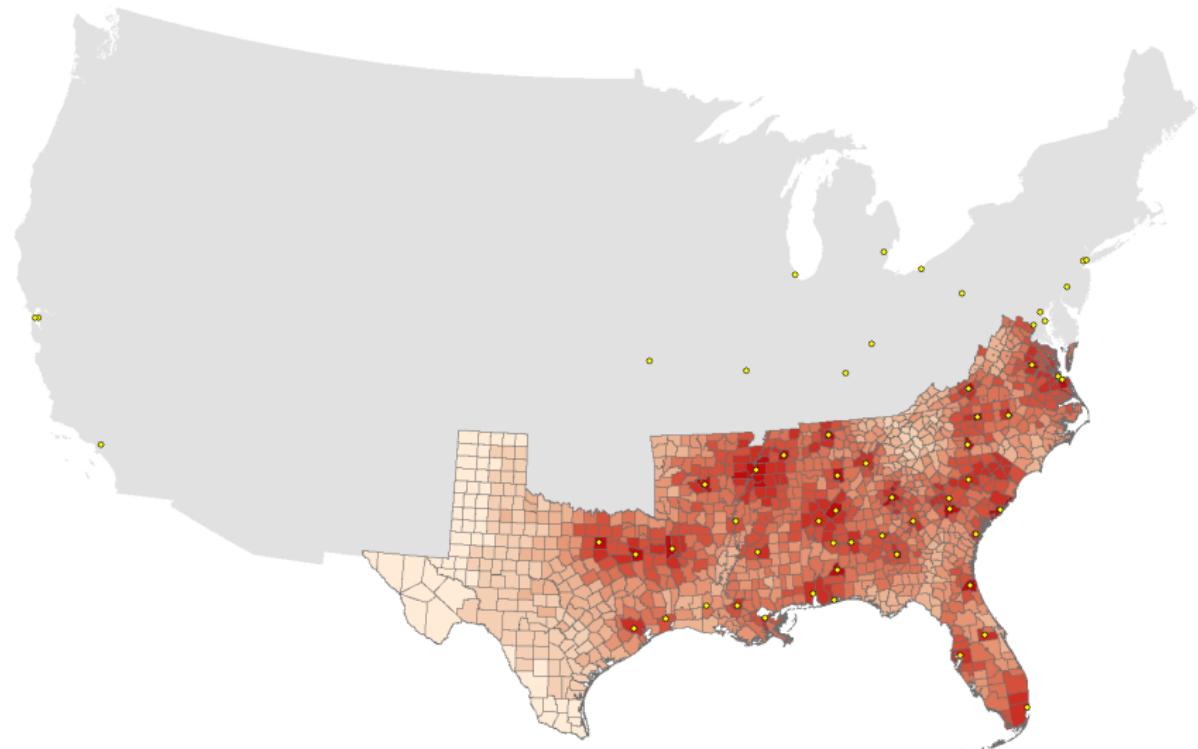


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Black Radio Stations, 1960



Black Radio Signal Strength, 1960



listener

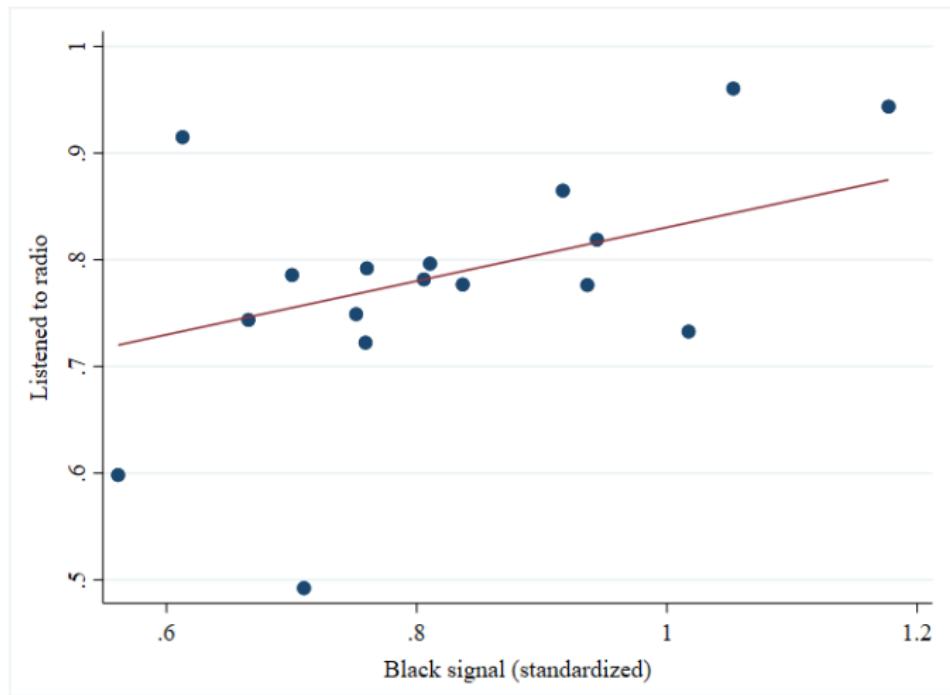
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Sponsor Magazine, 1960

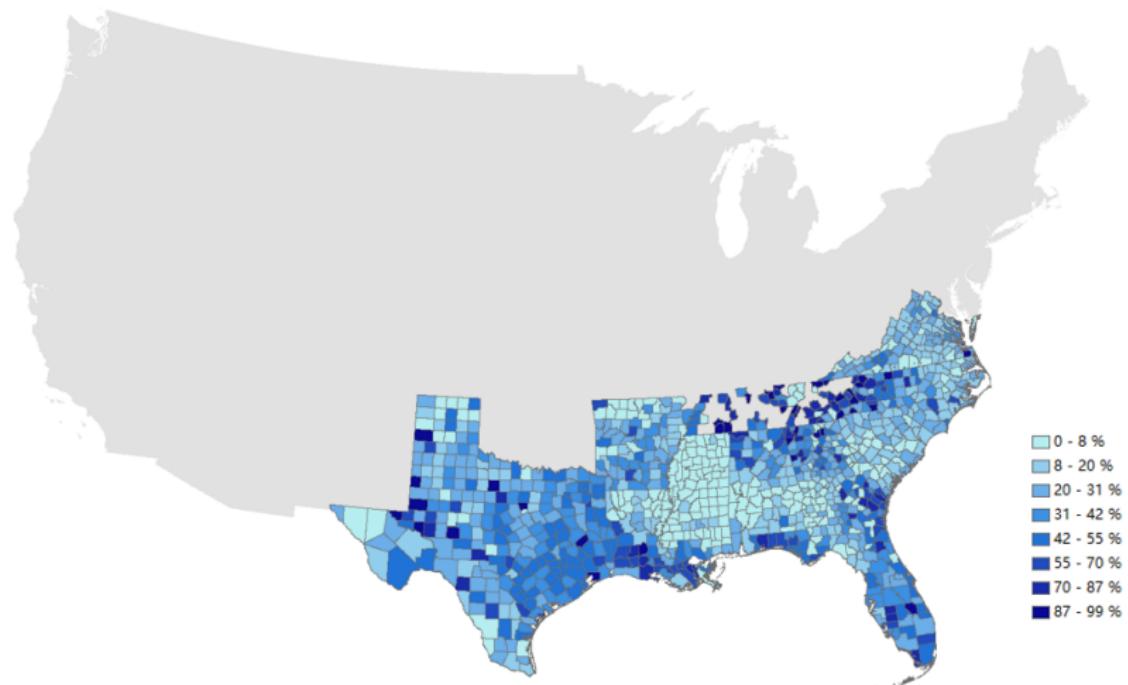
State and City	Call Letters	Rep Regional Network	Power	Freq. (kc)	Net. or Ind. (a)	Group- owned	Yrs. on Air	Yrs. of Negro Program. (b)	Hrs. Per Wk. on Air	% Hours Negro Program. (c)	Change in Negro Program. Hrs. (e)	Negro Program Breakdown (in %)					% Negro Adv. (f)	
												D. J.	Other Music	Religious	News	Homemaker	Public Service	
ALABAMA																		
Auburn	WAUD		250w	1230	N							5	80	5	5	5	5	30
Birmingham	WENN	John E. Pearson & Co.	Skw	1320	I	McLendon Ebony Co.	10	10	93½ D	100	5	49	35	5	1	10	100	
	WJLD	Forjoe	250w	1400	I	Johnston Bdctg.	18	16	132	100	5	46	8	39	3	2	2	100
Butler	WPRN	Keystone	1kw	1220	I			1	1	D 45	1	25	3	5	2	5	5	50
Eufaula	WULA	KBS	250w	1240	N	C. A. McClure stations	12	12	138	25	1	50	25	10	15		25	
Evergreen	WBLO		1kw	1460	I			3½	3½	D 65	1	75	20			5	5	
Flomaton	WTGB	Hil F. Best	500w	990	I			5	5	D 10	1	80	20					
Florence	WJOI	KBS	250w	1340	N			14	14		30	1	70	30			20	
Gadsden	WETO	Mac M. Thomas, KBS	1kw	930	I	Gadsden Radio Co.	10	5	90 D 10	5	60	40					115	
Huntsville	WEUP	Regional (The Bernard Ochs Co.), National (Bob Dore & Associates)	5kw	1600	I			2	2	101½ D	100	5	25	52	5	14	4	
Mobile	WGOK	Bernard Howard Co., Inc.	1kw	900	I	O. K. Group	2	2	84 D 100	5	46	42	4		B		100	
	WMOZ	Dore-Clayton (South)	1kw	960	I			9	9	98 D 100	5	75	10	5	5	5		70
Montgomery	WRMA	Everett-McKinney, Inc.	1kw	950	I	Radio Stn. WAOK- Atlanta, Ga.	B	B	98 D 100	5	60	30		B	2		100	
Selma	WGWC	Hal Holman, N.Y. James S. Ayres, Atlanta	250w	1340	N			14	14	204	50	5					50	
Tuscaloosa	WTUG	National-National Times Sales, Southeast-Bernard I. Ochs Co.	500w	790	I	Skyline Radio Net- work	3	3	96 D 100	5	24	5	23	B	7	33	100	
Tuscumbia	WVNA	Jack Masla, Inc.-Dora Clay- ton (residual)	Skw	1590	I			6	6	D 12	1	50	17	17		16		5

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First stage: Black radio signal and Black respondents' radio listening



% Black Voting-Age Population Registered to Vote, 1960



Mean black registration rate: 28 %

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Determinants of Black Radio Exposure (Balance Test)

Outcome: Black Radio Signal Strength, 1960

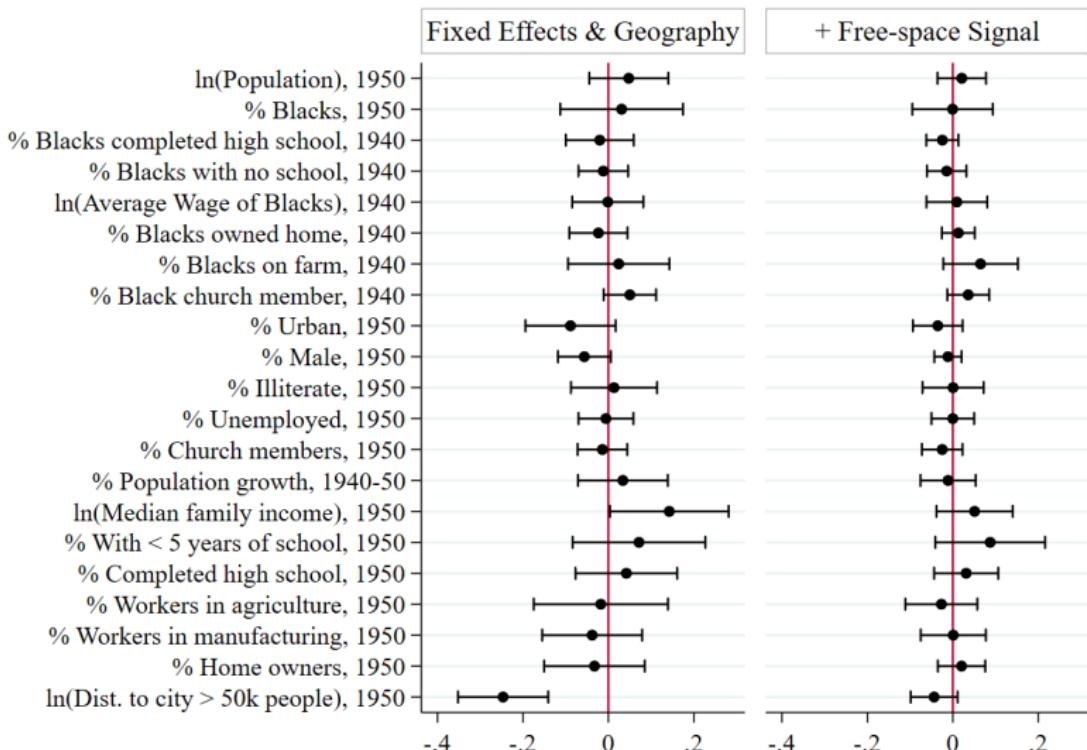
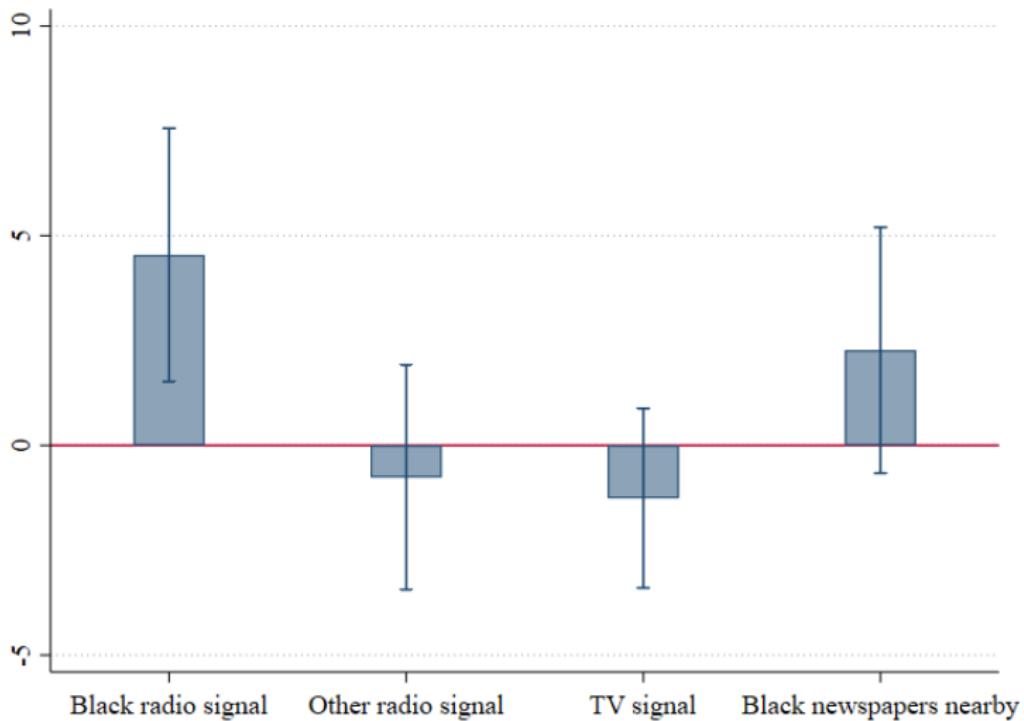


Table A.1: Placebo Tests on Past Racial Attitudes and Activism

	% Voted Strom Thurmond, 1948	Any lynching, 1882-1930	Lynch count, 1882-1930	NAACP chapter, 1942	In(NAACP member per 10,000 Black pop)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Black Radio Signal	1.15 (1.811)	-0.072 (0.044)	-0.660 (0.574)	-0.031 (0.060)	-0.020 (0.225)
Observations	881	899	899	899	891
R-squared	0.937	0.648	0.536	0.503	0.506
Baseline Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean of Dep. Var.	29.78	0.545	2.378	0.117	0.491
Std. Dev. of Dep. Var.	27.86	0.498	3.596	0.321	1.439

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Controlling for Exposure to Other Media



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Table A.2: Robustness Checks on Baseline Results

	% Black Voting-Age Population Registered to Vote, 1960			
	Drop counties near stations (1)	Mississippi only (2)	Control SignalFree flexibly (3)	Binary signal (4)
Black Radio Signal	5.607*** (1.746)	0.574 (1.564)	5.056*** (1.473)	
$I(Black\ Radio\ Signal \geq Median)$				3.010 (1.891)
Observations	519	81	835	835
R-squared	0.724	0.759	0.704	0.702
Full Baseline Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean of Dep. Var.	27.73	3.358	28.32	28.32
Std. Dev. of Dep. Var.	22.41	6.611	23.47	23.47

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Table A.3: Effects in Different Counties

		Outcome: % Black Registered to Vote, 1960			
		By Strom Thurmond's 1948 vote share		By NAACP presence in 1957	
		High (1)	Low (2)	No (3)	Yes (4)
Black Radio Signal		2.889* (1.594)	5.733** (2.637)	6.155*** (2.120)	0.149 (2.325)
Observations		413	412	512	297
R-squared		0.759	0.624	0.741	0.741
Full Baseline Controls		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean of Dep. Var.		20.54	35.71	28.40	27.60
Std. Dev. of Dep. Var.		21.10	23.04	25.36	19.10

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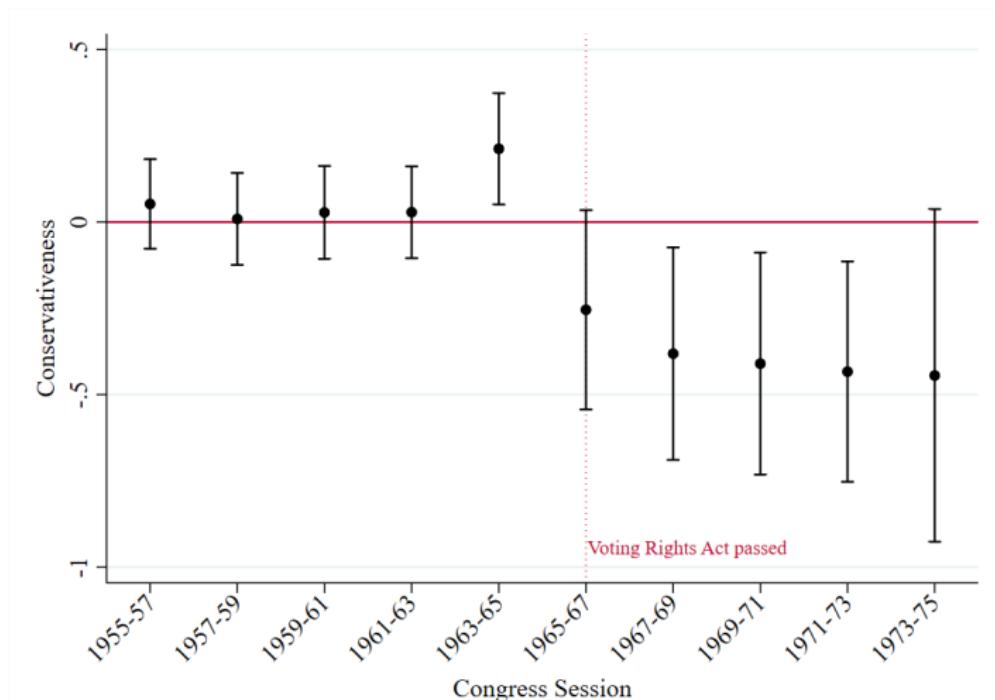
Table A.4: Effects on Individual Blacks' Attitudes and Behaviors

	(1) Familiar w/ NAACP	(2) Agree w/ NAACP	(3) Watch TV	(4) Read News	(5) Racial Stereotypes	(6) Stereotypes about Blacks
Black Radio Signal	0.473*** (0.128)	0.566*** (0.105)	-0.812*** (0.061)	0.151 (0.158)	-0.466*** (0.035)	-0.105* (0.058)
Observations	616	616	616	616	570	616
R-squared	0.152	0.125	0.201	0.305	0.049	0.051
State FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Free-space Signal	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Individual Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
County Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mean of Dep. Var.	0.784	0.713	0.705	0.690	0.688	0.177
Std. Dev. of Dep. Var.	0.412	0.453	0.457	0.463	0.464	0.382

Table A.5: Effects on Per Capita State Aid Transfers, 1962

	In(Transfer per capita)		Transfer per capita
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Black Signal x Black	0.076** (0.037)	0.060** (0.028)	338.205* (174.200)
Black Signal	-0.011 (0.034)	-0.005 (0.027)	-46.372 (173.310)
Black	0.022 (0.022)	-0.051** (0.024)	-318.932** (154.821)
Observations	1,083	873	873
R-squared	0.674	0.779	0.761
Free-space Signal	Yes	Yes	Yes
State Econ Area FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
County Characteristics	No	Yes	Yes
Mean of Dep. Var.	8.719	8.743	6563
Std. Dev. of Dep. Var.	0.313	0.304	2069

Effects on Southern Congressmen's Voting on Civil Rights Bills



↓ conservativeness of voting on civil rights bills by approx. 50%

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Table A.6: Full Baseline Specification Adjusting for Spatial Correlation in Error Terms

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	Clustering Level		Spatially-Corrected Standard Errors (Conley 1999)					
	State	SEA	10km	20km	50km	100km	200km	300km
Black Radio Signal	4.075*** (0.946)	4.075** (1.630)	4.075*** (1.490)	4.075*** (1.491)	4.075** (1.686)	4.075** (1.674)	4.075** (1.858)	4.075*** (1.476)
Observations	835	835	835	835	835	835	835	835

Notes: Observations at county level. Standard errors clustered at station level. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Table A.7: Effects on civil rights protests

	(1)	(2)
	Had a Protest	
Black Signal	-0.002 (0.046)	-0.040 (0.061)
Black Signal x Black		0.090 (0.075)
Black		0.101** (0.050)
Observations	873	873
R-squared	0.608	0.596
Full Baseline Controls	Yes	Yes
Mean of Dep. Var.	0.0813	0.0813
Std. Dev. of Dep. Var.	0.273	0.273

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