

Ballots instead of Bullets?

The effect of the Voting Rights Act on political violence

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Teaching Material
Journal of the European Economic Association

Early 60's: Violence in the US



Harlem riots (Jul 1964)



Birmingham bombing (Sept 1963)

Enfranchisement to curb Violence?



“Give us the ballot, and we will transform the salient misdeeds of bloodthirsty mobs into the calculated gooddeeds of orderly citizens.”

Martin Luther King, Washington - May 17, 1957

“If we don’t cast a ballot, it’s going to end up in a situation where we’re going to have to cast a bullet. It’s either a ballot or a bullet”

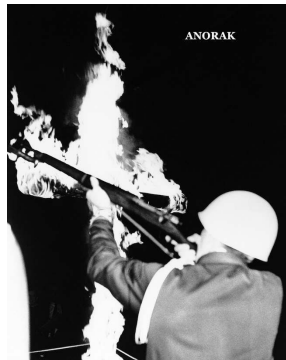
Malcolm X, Cleveland - April, 3, 1964



August 1965: the Voting Rights Act aimed at ending discrimination in voting but:



Detroit Riots (Jul 1967)



KKK ceremony (Nov 1965)

This Paper: Value-added

Causal effect of enfranchisement on political violence (≠ Democratisation)

Use the local discontinuities in enfranchisement generated by the Voting Rights Act

≠ Papers at the country-level + papers using within-country variations in the number of new voters to identify enfranchisement (Berlinski and Dewan, 2011; De Bromhead et al., 2020; Rohner and Saia, 2020)

The short-term effect of enfranchisement on political violence

≠ Papers on the long-term effect of the VRA mostly on public spending and representation (Besley et al., 2010; Cascio and Washington, 2013; Kuziemko and Washington, 2018; Fresh, 2018; Ang, 2019; Facchini et al., 2020)

Transmission channel: Enfranchisement decreases violence directly

≠ Indirect effects via electoral results or via reforms (Aidt et al., 2010; Aumann et al., 1983; Berlinski and Dewan, 2011; De Bromhead et al., 2020)

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Mechanisms: Enfranchisement ↗ Political Violence?

Enfranchisement → policies → indirect effect on political violence

- ↗ Elites' grievance (Passarelli and Tabellini, 2017; Fergusson et al., 2020)
- ↗ Elites' incentives to mount a coup ↗ Political Violence (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2001)
- ↗ Use of violence to counter the loss of influence in the ballot (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2008; Larcinese, 2017)

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- ↗ Redistribution and/or income ↗ Opportunity cost of conflict ↘ Political Violence (Collier and Rohner, 2008; Fergusson and Vargas, 2013; Rohner and Saia, 2020)

Enfranchisement → direct effect via opportunity structures

- Self-enforcing democracy: Enfranchisement ↗ political participation ↘ political violence (Gleditsch and Ruggeri, 2010; Fearon, 2011; Przeworski, 1999, 2015; Fetzer et al., 2018)

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History - Voting in the US

1870: 15th amendment de jure enfranchised all men

Right after, Jim Crow laws in some States/counties:

- Literacy tests
- Polling taxes
- Publication of voting registries

As a consequence:

- Turnout/registration decreased in the US (mainly in the US South)
→ Turnout in 1876: 81.8% and in 1920: 49.2%
- In Mississippi, registration rate of voting-age African Americans below 6% after 1890

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Discrimination in Voting



Jim Crow laws gave local officials enough room to massively disenfranchise black voters

Rosa Parks finished high-school
(as only 7% of African Americans of her generation)

To register to vote, Rosa Parks had to:

1. Take two literacy tests
2. Copy her answers to a third test
3. Threaten local officials to use this copy in a lawsuit
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Voting Rights Act - Coverage

1965: The Voting Rights Act aimed at ending discrimination in voting (Section 2).

The VRA coverage formula (Section 4.b) had two cumulative criteria...

- Maintaining a test or device limiting voters registration
- Registration or Turnout < 50% (at the State or county-level)

... to define administrative units under special provisions of the Act:

- Federal preclearance before changing voting rules (Section 5)
- Ban of any device or test limiting voters' registration (Section 4.a)
- Receive federal officials to register voters (Section 6)

As a result:

- Random assignment at the local level
(e.g. counties with turnout>50% could be covered because part of a State with turnout <50%)
(e.g. counties with turnout<50% could remain uncovered because they had registration>50%)
- 7 States partially or completely covered

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Voting Rights Act - Impact

"All the News That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times.

LATE CITY EDITION
NEW YORK, SATURDAY, AUGUST 7, 1965
TEN CENTS

VIETCONG APPEAL TO NORTH VIETNAM FOR MEN AND ARMS
Political Front of American Siege Force Invades In North by the War

PEACE TERMS RESTATED
Inaugurates Ban Negotiation Unless They Participate With October Year

ENGINEER WARNS CITY CAN RUN OUT OF WATER IN 1968
Candidates Tell of Danger in Reservoir to Protect Philadelphia Supply

JOHNSON SIGNS VOTING RIGHTS BILL, ORDERS IMMEDIATE ENFORCEMENT; 4 SUITS WILL CHALLENGE POLL TAX

VIET CONG ASKS HANOI FOR TROOPS
First Open Appeal To North Vietnam

RECEIVING Nkrumah's Entry
Johnson: No Plan to Bomb Hanoi

PEKING SINKS TWO FORMOSA GUNBOATS

ERHARD OPENS CAMPAIGN

NEW VOTING LAW
Americas Names Negroes CAPITOL IS SCENE
ATTACKED IN SUIT
To Jobs as Polling Clerks

Nkrumah Note on Vietnam Is Delivered to President

VIETNAM'S LOSSES




NEW YORK Herald Tribune
European Edition
PARIS, SATURDAY, AUGUST 7, 1965

'The Time for Injustice is Gone'
President Signs Bill on Negro Vote Rights

King: 900,000 Negroes Will Register in August

Vote Drive to Double

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Voting Rights Act - Reactions

Research on the effect of the VRA on political participation (Fresh, 2018; Ang, 2019)

USCCR Report (1965): Massive enfranchisement in covered areas

- Federal officials registered 56.789 voters in 2 months in covered areas
- October 1965: “Full compliance with the Act in many areas”

Reaction of white/reactionary voters:

- Georges Wallace’s campaign to register white voters as a response
- In Alabama, the number of new white voters between 1964-1967 outstripped the one of Black voters (Davidson and Grofman, 1994)

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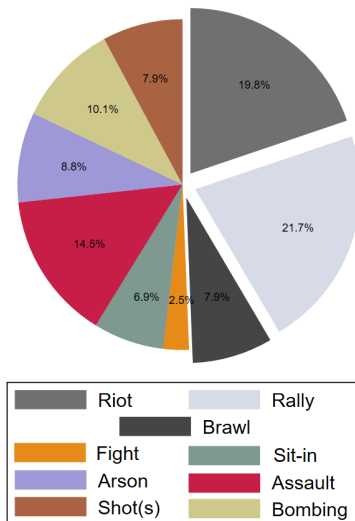
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Data

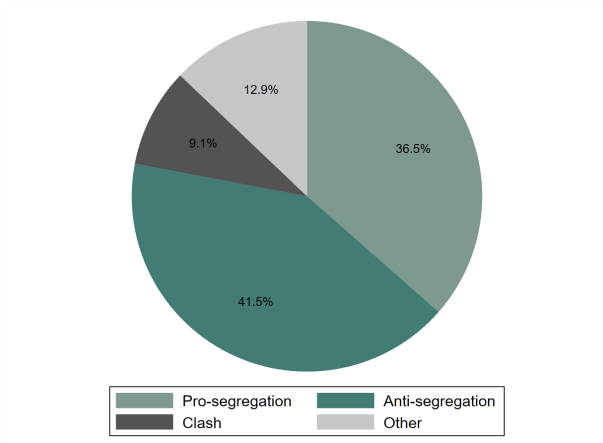
Data on Political violence from the *Dynamics of Collective Action* dataset
(Stanford University - McAdam et al., 2003)

- Political violence: Collective, Public, clear political claim, use of weapons and/or injured/casualties
- Examples: violent protests, riots, KKK meetings turning violent, lynchings, bombings, arsons
- Information on the type of events, initiators
- Geocoding of their location

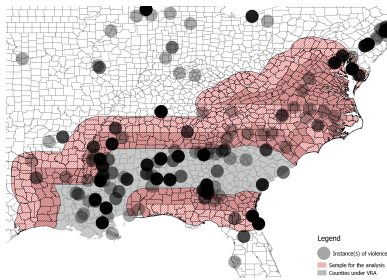
Data - Type of events



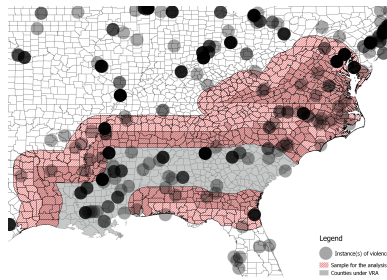
Data - Motives for violence



Identification strategy - Counties at the border



a) Political violence before the VRA

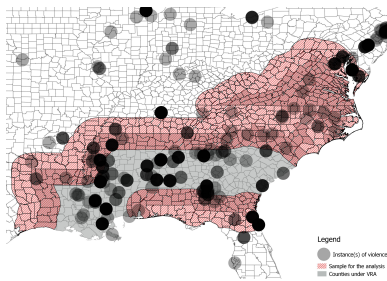


b) Political violence after the VRA

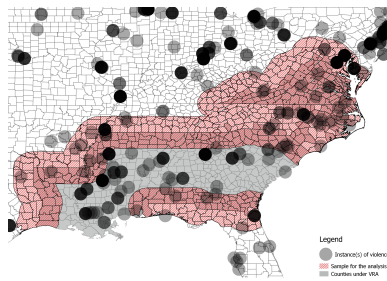
318 episodes of violence, from which 277 were related to segregation:

- 116 launched by pro-segregation movements;
- 132 launched by anti-segregation movements;
- 29 are clashes between pro-segregation and anti-segregation.

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Estimations: Diff-in-diff at the border

Estimation via Poisson fixed-effects (robust to estimating via OLS, conditional logit)

$$Pr(Viol_{i,t} = Y \mid Viol_{i,t-1}, VRA_{i,t}, \phi_t + \eta_i) = f(\alpha, \beta_1 Viol_{i,t-1}, \beta_2 VRA_{i,t}, \phi_t, \eta_i, \varepsilon_{i,t})$$

- $Viol_{i,t}$: Measure of political violence (riots, bombings, lynching...).
Incidence/Onset and Overall/segregation-related (month-county level)
- ϕ_t : Month fixed-effect
- η_i : County fixed-effect
- $VRA_{i,t}$: VRA dummy
(=1 if a county is under special provisions of the VRA at time t)
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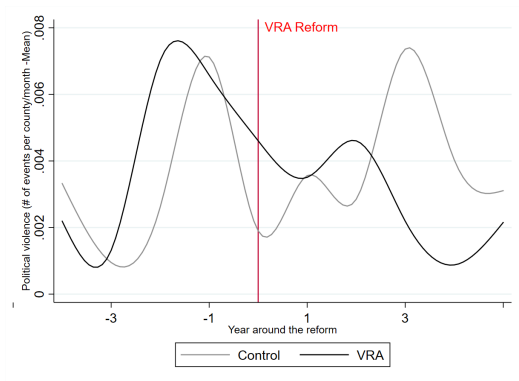
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Parallel trends & preview of results



Evolution of political violence in treated and non-treated areas
(Incidence rate)

Results

Table 1: Baseline results - Enfranchisement → Violence

	(1.1)	(1.2)	(1.3)	(1.4)
Dep var	$Viol_{c,t}$	$Viol_{c,t}$	$Viol_{c,t}$	$Viol_{c,t}$
Sample	US	<200km	<150km	<100km
$Viol_{c,t-1}$	0.135*** (3.370)	0.287*** (4.880)	0.389*** (7.234)	0.438*** (5.412)
VRA	-1.771*** (-7.676)	-0.993*** (-2.990)	-0.831** (-2.329)	-0.800** (-2.149)
IRR	0.17	0.37	0.44	0.45
Obs	39,032	19,873	17,017	12,138
Nb counties	328	167	143	102

Robust z-statistics in parentheses: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$. IRR stands for Incidence Rate Ratio.

- VRA halved instances of political violence in treated counties
- Results do not depend on the buffer around the border

Robustness

Spatial correlation of violence?

- Taking spatial correlation inside the 100km window into account (RDD, Spatial lags, Nearest-neighbor matching)

How valid is the identification strategy?

- Placebo dates of treatment
- North-Carolina only
- Placebo treatment (<50% turnout in 1964).

Effect varies with the relative size of the discriminated population

- The bigger the enfranchisement, the bigger the effect

Anecdotal evidence:

- Migration and biases in reporting likely not explaining the results

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Mechanism- The Direct effects of enfranchisement

How to test if direct or indirect mechanisms explain this effect?

1. Test for other variables also impacted by the indirect channel

- Enfranchisement → Policies ↘ Grievance → Violence
- Enfranchisement → Policies ↘ Grievance → Protesting

2. Types of violence:

- Strategic violence (= violence by core activists) would be more impacted by a change in opportunity structure than violence as escalation (mixing grievance and retaliation as motives)
- Indirect effects decrease violence by the group whose preferences are the most-aligned with changes in policies
- Direct effects decrease violence by all groups as they invest in the voting process

3. Timing:

Indirect effects: Materialize over time when policies are implemented

Direct effects: Materialize around elections when complementarities between voting and violence ↗

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Mechanisms - Enfranchisement and non-violent protests

Table 2: Non-violent protests and enfranchisement

Dep variable	(2.1) Peaceful All _{c,t} 100km	(2.2) Peaceful Onset _{c,t} 100km	(2.3) Viol All _{c,t} 100km	(2.4) Viol Onset _{c,t} 100km
VRA	-0.553* (-1.908)	-0.313 (-1.456)	-0.830** (-2.398)	-0.794** (-2.126)
Peaceful _{c,t}			0.367*** (6.996)	0.388*** (5.467)
Peaceful _{c,t-1}	0.175*** (6.333)		-0.0583 (-1.094)	-0.0278 (-0.443)
VRA × Peaceful _{c,t-1}			0.425*** (3.963)	0.599*** (2.771)
IRR VRA	0.58	0.73	0.44	0.45
IRR VRA × Peaceful			1.53	1.82
Obs	14,875	14,282	12,138	11,911
Nb of counties	125	125	102	102

Robust z-statistics in parentheses: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$. IRR stands for Incidence rate ratio.

- VRA had less of an impact on peaceful protests
- Even when controlling for the number of peaceful protests, the VRA decreases violence
- VRA decreased strategic violence more than violence as an escalation (positive interaction VRA × Peaceful)

Mechanisms - Types of violence and timing

Table 3: Timing and types of violence

Dep Variable	(3.1) Viol _{c,t} Pro-Segr	(3.2) Onset _{c,t} Pro-Segr	(3.3) Viol _{c,t} Anti-Segr	(3.4) Onset _{c,t} Anti-Segr
VRA Base	0.198 (0.326)	-0.0350 (-0.0596)	-0.161 (-0.291)	-0.304 (-0.488)
VRA Pre-Elect	-1.947 (-1.612)	-1.951 (-1.645)	-1.455** (-2.132)	-1.491** (-2.147)
VRA Post-Elect	-1.837** (-2.037)	-2.120** (-2.516)	-0.753 (-1.354)	-0.946 (-1.641)
IRR VRA Base	1.21	0.97	0.85	0.74
IRR VRA Pre-Elect	0.14	0.14	0.23	0.23
IRR VRA Post-Elect	0.16	0.12	0.47	0.39
Control for Viol _{c,t-1}	Yes	No	Yes	No
Drop if Viol _{c,t-1} >0	No	Yes	No	Yes
Obs	7,735	7,618	7,735	7,610
Number of counties	65	65	65	65

Robust z-statistics in parentheses: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. IRR stands for Incidence Rate Ratio.

- VRA decreased similarly violence from groups fighting segregation and from groups in favor of segregation
- Most of the effect appears around the 1968 elections
- The important drop in violence from antisegregation groups before the elections do not match a disaggrievement mechanism but can match a mechanism based on changing opportunity structures.

Conclusion

- **Voting Rights Act (Local variations in enfranchisement):**
Perfect setting to isolate the effect of enfranchisement
- The Voting Rights Act \searrow discrimination in voting \nearrow voting (turnout)
- The Voting Rights Act (enfranchisement) \searrow political violence
- Proposed mechanism:
 - Direct effects: Enfranchisement direct groups' efforts to bend policies towards voting (= divert efforts from other ways to bend policies including political violence)

→ Indirect effects via reforms and policy changes are not the only mechanism explaining how enfranchisement \searrow political violence

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Relevance?

The New York Times

Seven Ways Alabama Has Made It Harder to Vote

Five years ago, the Supreme Court struck down a key part of the landmark Voting Rights Act. Since then, Alabama has enacted a slew of restrictive voting laws and policies.

NYT: 23/06/2018

US election

Georgia: federal judge allows state to proceed with mass voting rolls purge

- Judge also scheduled hearing for more arguments on the matter
- Stacey Abrams's group had filed emergency motion on Monday
- **Stacey Abrams: 'I'm not convinced we will have fair elections'**

The Guardian: 16/12/2019

A modern day poll tax: How Republicans are trying to stop 1.4 million people from voting in Florida

When voters in Florida voted to remove a law keeping reformed criminals from voting, Republicans quickly began working to subvert the results. **Clark Mindock** reports

The Independent: 07/12/2019



Atlanta Journal Constitution: 18/08/2020