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EVIDENCE FROM THE POST-RECONSTRUCTION SOUTH

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# The Effect of Propaganda on Elections: Evidence from the Post-Reconstruction South\*

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## Abstract

Newspapers in the post-Reconstruction South disseminated propaganda accusing Black voters of excessive public corruption. This paper analyzes new data showing that propaganda influenced election outcomes by weakening biracial political coalitions that challenged the Democratic Party immediately before the adoption of new constitutions legally disenfranchising Black voters. These new constitutions reinforced Democratic control of Southern governments that lasted decades into the twentieth century. Specifically, I find evidence that insinuations of public corruption motivated voters to the polls and split the support for biracial coalitions that may have challenged control of the Democratic Party. I also find evidence that large changes in exposure to propaganda were needed to influence election outcomes when voters were routinely exposed to propaganda.

**Keywords:** disenfranchisement; corruption; election outcomes; Reconstruction; Jim Crow; media bias.

**JEL Classification:** D73, N11, N41, N91

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Every effort was made by careful propaganda to induce the nation to believe that the Southern wing of the Democratic Party was fighting the same kind of corruption as the North and that corruption was represented in the South solely by carpetbaggers and Negroes.... The Negro vote and graft were indissolubly linked in the public mind by incessant propaganda. Race repulsion, race hate, and race pride were increased by every subtle method, until the Negro and his friends were on the defensive and the Negro himself almost convinced of his own guilt.

W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935)

## 1. Introduction

Six Southern states adopted new constitutions between 1890 and 1902, which legally disenfranchised most Black men (Kousser, 1974).<sup>1</sup> It is generally understood that white voters in the South were divided over whether to support formal disenfranchisement prior to the adoption of these constitutions (Key, 1949; Kousser, 1974; Wynes, 1961; Woodward, 2002). Historians have noted that anti-Black propaganda circulated by newspapers helped build support among whites for formal disenfranchisement (Du Bois, 1935; Woodward, 2002; Prince, 2014). However, the significance of the propaganda is not well understood. I contribute to our understanding by examining whether propaganda influenced elections that were pivotal to the establishment of the new state constitutions. I find that anti-Black propaganda helped divide Democratic opposition before these elections. This contributed to the Democratic Party's control over the development of the constitutions that reinforced their power over Southern governments for the first half of the twentieth century.

In this paper, I examine a specific example of anti-Black propaganda where Black voters were accused of excessive public corruption. In 1935, W.E.B. Du Bois wrote in *Black Reconstruction in America* that propaganda had been used to support disenfranchising Black men. This included excessive public corruption involving Black voters and politicians (Du Bois, 1935).<sup>2</sup> Modern historians have come to support Du Bois, finding major errors with the

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<sup>1</sup> Women were generally not able to vote until after the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the US Constitution in 1920. There were, however, states that had extended suffrage to women prior to 1920 but this was very limited in the South. The exceptions included Louisiana, where women were able to vote on tax and bond issues after 1898, and in Mississippi, where women were eligible to vote on issues involving education after 1878. Black women were generally not eligible to vote in the South until after the Voting Rights Act of 1965. For more on voting rights for women, see Moehling and Thomasson (2020). For more on state level changes in voting rights for different issues see Keyssar (2000).

<sup>2</sup> Du Bois (1935) writes "Grounded in such elementary and high school teaching, an American youth attending college today would learn from current textbooks of history that.... Reconstruction was a disgraceful attempt to subject white people to ignorant Negro rule; and that, according to a Harvard professor of history, 'Legislative expenses were grotesquely extravagant; the colored members in some states engaging in a saturnalia of corrupt expenditure' (Encyclopedia Britannica, 14<sup>th</sup> Edition, Volume 22, p. 815, by Frederick Jackson Turner)."

earlier perspective that Reconstruction was a failure because Black voters and politicians were corrupt and corruptible (Foner, 1982, 1988; Tunnell, 2006; Rosen, 2017).<sup>3</sup> However, the magnitude of the effects of this propaganda on electoral outcomes have never been quantified.

Anti-Black propaganda was an important part of the Democratic Party campaign to maintain political control (Prince, 2014). Political competition experienced by Democratic politicians in the South has been associated with the dissemination of anti-Black sentiment by a sympathetic press (Woodward, 2002; Glaeser, 2005; Ottinger and Winkler, 2022). Several examples of biracial coalitions that challenged the Democratic Party emerged between the 1860s and the 1890s. A well-documented example of a biracial coalition is the so-called Radical Republicans. This group, at least early on, included prominent members who advocated explicitly for overturning the social, political, and economic order of the South through the advancement of economic and political rights for Blacks (Trefousse, 1969). There are also examples of biracial – and even bipartisan – regional coalitions, such as the Readjusters in Virginia (Pearson, 1917; Morton, 1919; Woodward, 1951; Maddex, 1970; Moore, 1974; Tarter, 2016).<sup>4</sup> Finally, the Populist Party is often acknowledged as a biracial party of predominately farmers, but they never embraced social or economic equality and, in some places, were as prejudiced as members of the Democratic Party (Woodward, 1951, 1973; Goodwyn, 1976).<sup>5</sup>

The suppression of political coalitions challenging the Democratic Party was effectuated through a public campaign based on the premise of white supremacy. This campaign resulted in both legal (e.g., suffrage reforms) and extralegal (e.g., voter suppression) strategies to disenfranchise Black voters. An important aspect of this campaign was an effort to delegitimize Black voting using insinuations of public corruption. This included targeting white voters with

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<sup>3</sup> Foner (1982) presents a historiography of Reconstruction from the traditionalists, to the revisionists, to the post-revisionists. This includes a discussion of the Dunning School to which Foner suggests their traditionalist influence on public perception was related to a best-selling book by Claude Bowers's called *The Tragic Era: The Revolution After Lincoln* (Cambridge, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1929).

<sup>4</sup> The Readjusters introduced many reforms including increased state funding for schools, the repeal of the poll tax, the abolishment of the whipping post, increased patronage for Blacks, and the creation of the first public college for Blacks (what is now Virginia State University in Petersburg, Virginia).

<sup>5</sup> During the 1890s, in North Carolina, there was also an alliance developed to challenge Democrats between Populists and Republicans called Fusionism. Specifically, the alliance was made of Blacks, anti-secessionist in the western part of the state, and commercial farmers. The Fusionism alliance led to a Republican-Populist majority in the General Assembly in 1895 and a Republican governor in 1896. During a brief period from 1895 until 1901, Fusionism resulted in several reforms including increased spending on schools and additional voting access. However, there reforms along with political appointments of Blacks that were made by the governor as well as internal divisions over policy direction, led Democrats to capitalize on the divisions by leveling the charge of "Negro domination" and "Negro rule." These charges led to violence, including voter repression during the 1898 election, which has been well documented in Wilmington, North Carolina. See Edmunds (1951) and Cecelski and Tyson (2000).

threats of the advancement of Black patronage, “ballot box stuffing,” and other references to public corruption.<sup>6</sup> In the end, the Democratic Party was successful in establishing an undemocratic oligarchy throughout the South that controlled state governments and influenced federal policymaking for some 80 years (Key, 1949).

I consider the importance of propaganda in motivating voters by analyzing trends in references to Black voters and public corruption in Southern newspapers. I use data collected from a large archive of historical papers found at *Newspapers.com*. The establishment of the partisan press was important to the politics of the era, representing an advanced method of communication (Abbot, 1995, 2004). The historical literature suggests that party newspapers informed voters, encouraged voter turnout, challenged the political opposition, and defined party policy (Abbot, 1995). In their capacity as an explicitly political press, many of these newspapers disseminated a message of public corruption that involved Black voters and politicians.

There are several main findings. First, I find a procyclical pattern to newspaper references of public corruption relative to the election cycle. Between 1865 and 1920, there were 65 percent more references to corruption and Black voting in election years compared to non-election years within the same cycle. Second, the difference between references in election and non-election years within an election cycle is smallest at eventful points in time. This includes (1) immediately after the end of Reconstruction, (2) during the first election post-Reconstruction when every Southern state had a Democratic governor and legislature, and (3) immediately after Southern states enacted suffrage reforms through the adoption of new state constitutions.<sup>7</sup>

The main purpose of this paper is to examine the influence of propaganda on the effort to adopt new constitutions that restricted suffrage. Between 1890 and 1902, six states adopted new constitutions that were intended to restrict Black voting by enacting poll taxes, literacy and character tests, property qualifications, and other policies in combination with exemptions

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<sup>6</sup> In his seminal book on Reconstruction, W.E.B. Du Bois (1935) suggests that three myths had dominated the study of Reconstruction: (1) “All Negroes were ignorant,” (2) “All Negroes were lazy, dishonest and extravagant, and (3) “Negroes were responsible for bad government during Reconstruction.” Tunnell (2006, p. 790) points out that “negro rule,” “negro-scalawag rule,” and “negro-carpetbag rule” were all used interchangeably by Southern newspaper editors by 1870. McLaughlin-Stonham (2020) connects the anti-corruption efforts in Louisiana during the 1890s with white supremacy.

<sup>7</sup> In 1877, Democrats controlled every Southern legislature and executive. However, in some states, such as Virginia, control of the state governments did change hands until the middle of the 1880s. Democratic control was again briefly threatened regionally, such as in North Carolina, by the emergence of a coalition between Republicans and Populists.

for many white voters: Mississippi (1890), South Carolina (1895), Louisiana (1898), North Carolina (1900), Alabama (1901), and Virginia (1902).<sup>8</sup>

My empirical strategy exploits differences in the timing of critical elections that initiated the chain of events culminating with the new constitutions. Specifically, I identify two critical election periods. The decision to draft a new constitution was initiated by state legislatures or governors that were previously elected.<sup>9</sup> The first period includes the two elections prior to the decision to hold a constitutional convention or draft a new constitution. Once the new constitution was drafted, it was offered for adoption. The second critical election period includes the time between the decision to draft the new constitution and its adoption. Focusing the analysis on the critical election periods allows me to examine the impact of references to corruption in the leadup to elections setting the stage for constitutional reforms.<sup>10</sup> This allows me to exploit the differences in timing for elections between states, while also focusing on the elections that preceded the constitutional draft and adoption. Finally, this strategy allows me to exploit the timing of references relative to the elections with more than 90 percent of references to corruption and Black voting occurring before the election within the critical election year in each state.

I find evidence that references to corruption and Black voters in newspapers increased voter turnout, total voters, and Populist vote share in both critical election periods. During the two election periods, I find that an increase of 20 to 30 references to corruption and Black voting over the course of a year was associated with an increase in voter turnout by about 3 percentage points, an increase Populist vote share by between 2 and 6 percentage points, and an increase

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<sup>8</sup> Texas also adopted a legislatively referred constitutional amendment in November 1902 adding a poll tax as a prerequisite to voting. The amendment, Joint Resolution No. 3, was introduced in the Texas Senate on January 10, 1901, and in the House a day later. However, because the change was not as extensive as the reforms introduced in the other states, I exclude Texas for the purposes of implementing the identification. There are other reasons to exclude Texas. For instance, the constituency of the Democratic Party in Texas was much more varied compared to other Southern states, including groups such as Hispanic Catholics that were not prevalent elsewhere. The People's Party (i.e., the Populists) in Texas was also different having been a fusionist party of Jeffersonian Democrats and farmers.

<sup>9</sup> In North Carolina, the constitutional reforms were passed by the legislature in 1899 and were adopted as part of a special election in August 1900. Therefore, in the case of North Carolina, the first period includes the two elections prior to the drafting of a new constitution by the state legislature. For additional information on state disenfranchising conventions in Alabama, South Carolina, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Virginia see Kousser (1974).

<sup>10</sup> Kousser (1974, pp. 139) notes that the events leading up to the convention were, perhaps, more important than the convention itself. Specifically, he suggests that "focusing on the conventions themselves, scholars have tended to slight the political battles that prepare the way for disenfranchisement in each state and exaggerate the disagreements with the safely Democratic gatherings. The fact is that suppression of dissenting groups and parties by legal and extralegal means preceded the conventions. On the other hand, the eclipse of the opposition was neither complete nor necessarily permanent at the time any of the conventions met, and both the collapse of the enemies of restriction and the consensus among its friends often predated the conventions by only a few months."

in Republican vote share by as many as 3 percentage points. These effects are large given that the magnitude of the increase in references published in newspapers located in some counties was 5 to 7 times greater than these baseline estimates.

I also find that the magnitude of changes in corruption references was an important factor in determining election outcomes. Specifically, there is little evidence of newspaper references motivating political outcomes unless the annual value exceeded the 95th percentile of references within a county over the period from 1870 to 1920 in the first critical election period, and 90th percentile in the second critical election period. The exception is that corruption references were associated with almost a standard deviation increase in the vote share for Populist candidates when they exceeded the 75th percentile during the first critical election period.

There are several ways that these findings contribute to the existing literature. First, they provide evidence that the events preceding the constitutional conventions and suffrage reforms were important, as suggested by Kousser (1974). The finding that insinuations may have had consequential effects on vote share and turnout has implications for examining the debate between Key and Kousser over the importance of extralegal versus legal strategies to disenfranchise Blacks (Key, 1949; Kousser, 1974; Bertocchi and Dimico, 2017). Specifically, limiting the effectiveness of biracial coalitions may have contributed to limited political representation for Blacks, which ultimately established the political environment favorable to disenfranchisement.

Furthermore, the finding that propaganda increased vote share for Populist candidates builds on the understanding, first identified by Kousser (1974), of why Populists may have considered Black Republicans to be corrupt. Contrary to Ottinger and Winkler (2022), I find no evidence that historical support for the Populist Party influenced the measure of anti-Black propaganda during the critical election periods. The findings from this paper imply that additional examination of voter turnout and vote share around other critical elections may be worthwhile, especially as it is related to violence, voter fraud, and other extralegal voter suppression strategies.

This paper also contributes to the literature on the political economy of media bias. Existing literature finds that newspapers can affect turnout without changing voter share (Gentzkow et al., 2014), that news coverage follows an election cycle (Strömberg, 2001; Gentzkow, 2006), and that there is a relationship between the magnitude of exposure to media narratives and their effects on election outcomes (Bernhardt et al., 2008). This paper provides support for these findings by showing that propaganda was higher in election years. I also find

that large changes in the level of exposure to propaganda are needed to affect election outcomes when voters are routinely exposed to propaganda. Finally, this research builds on our understanding of the theoretical relationships between news coverage and electoral outcomes in a historical setting underlying many of the empirical papers on the political economy of media bias (Mallainathan and Shleifer, 2005; Bernhardt et al., 2008; and Puglisi and Snyder, 2011).

## 2. Background

### *2A. The role of newspapers in disseminating anti-Black propaganda*

Legal disenfranchisement of Black voters was not universally supported by whites during the post-Reconstruction period (Wynes, 1961; Kousser, 1974; Woodward, 2002). This raises a question about the importance of events immediately preceding the adoption of the disenfranchising constitutions in Southern states (Kousser, 1974). In essence, what led some voters to change their minds on legal disenfranchisement?

It is possible that the Southern press had a role in this process.<sup>11</sup> The party press was an especially dominant form of news media, important in shaping political platforms and propagating party opinion.<sup>12</sup> At the time of the Civil War, the party press accounted for 80 percent of total newspapers in circulation (Abbot, 1995; Bulla, 2008). A prominent Southern reaction to the policies of Reconstruction was expressed as opposition to federal occupation, enfranchisement of Black men, civil rights for the newly freed enslaved, the disenfranchisement of Confederate veterans, and other pro-reform policies – all conveyed within the partisan press of the South that was dominated by Democratic Party organs published daily, weekly, and monthly.

Noticing the importance of the press, Congress passed an appropriation in March 1867 to provide money intended to support a Republican Party press in the South based on their

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<sup>11</sup> Besides the press, there was general pro-Southern (and anti-Northern) culture that was fostered by Confederate nationalists during the Civil War. A distinctly Confederate nationalist identity was reinforced through the publication of newspapers, textbooks, journals, and other educational materials with the intention of fostering an identity independent of Northern influence (Bernath, 2010). Although the independence movement had expired at the end of the war, Southern writing evolved into composing a pro-Confederate, anti-Reconstruction, pro-states' rights narrative based on a Southern identity that was both explicitly and implicitly tied to the social structures that existed in the pre-war South (Bernath, 2010; Hale, 2013). Central to this social, economic, and political identity was the notion of white supremacy.

<sup>12</sup> The public's expectations of the press first developed around the American Revolution were not only to communicate the actual news, advertise, and editorialize, but to use stories to develop conceptions of "consent and representation, tyranny and freedom, virtue and corruption, interests and power" (Parkinson, 2016). Throughout early-America the press had endeavored to define nebulous concepts like "liberty" and "representation" when both were limited and required careful propagation to take hold (Parkinson, 2016).



understanding that the success of Reconstruction would require challenging this narrative. The Republican press was also able to take advantage of support from the federal occupation by printing advertisements for the military and official notices. However, by 1875 the federal subsidies dried up as support for Reconstruction in the North had faded (Abbot, 1980). By 1877, very few Republican papers were supported by readership while the Democratic Party press established a dominance over the Southern market that would continue until the early-1900s (Abbot, 1980; Gentzkow et al., 2015).

This historical account suggests that reader preferences, rather than patronage, had a large role in determining the content, distribution, and success of the newspapers published during the period (Baldasty, 1992; Abbott, 2004; Gentzkow et al., 2015). Still, there were close associations between newspaper publishers, anti-Black propaganda, and the politics of Jim Crow. For example, in Virginia, Carter Glass was the editor of the *Lynchburg News* and later owner of *Daily Advance* before authoring many of the policies to disenfranchise Black men as a delegate of the Virginia constitutional convention. His father, Major Glass, was the editor of the *Petersburg News* and *Danville Post*. Harry Byrd, the influential Virginia politician who would eventually become a leader in the effort to resist the integration of schools following the US Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, was also a newspaper publisher and editor after assuming the *Winchester Star* from his father in 1903.

Gentzkow et al. (2015) also find that changes in political control influenced newspaper circulation in the South between 1869 and 1900. Specifically, when Democrats came into power, the circulation of papers affiliated with the Democratic Party generally increased and those affiliated with the Republican Party decreased. Ottinger and Winkler (2022) also find evidence that anti-Black coverage of newspapers affiliated with the Democratic Party was driven by the political threat experienced by Democratic politicians.

One example of propaganda circulated throughout the South by newspapers was that of exceptional public corruption at the hands of Black voters and politicians.<sup>13</sup> This was first discussed by W.E.B. Du Bois in his seminal work on the period, *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935). Insinuations of “negro rule,” “negroism,” “negro-scalawag,” “negro-

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<sup>13</sup> It is now accepted that a great deal of the historical literature written during Jim Crow period simply downplays the existence of anti-Black violence that may have been associated with these narratives and continued to propagate this message of excessive public corruption involving Blacks (Chesson, 1990). As Chesson (1990) reports, one of the primary public school textbooks used in Virginia during the 1960s, Cavalier Commonwealth (Hemphill et al., 1963), wrote under the subheading “Improving the Electorate” that “reform-minded delegates were determined... to disfranchise all unintelligent voters. These advocates of a purified electorate felt that political standards in Virginia had been lowered by the broadening of the suffrage in 1851 and 1869. (The level of political morality in other states and in the national parties before Jackson’s presidency or even Lincoln’s also seemed preferable, in Virginian’s minds, to the widespread corruption of later times.)”

carpetbag,” “ballot box stuffing,” “negro vote buying,” and other characterizations that reflected Black corruption were all commonplace in newspapers and other forms of mass communication during the Reconstruction, post-Reconstruction, and early Jim Crow periods (Du Bois, 1935; Foner, 1988; Tunnell, 2006; Rosen, 2017).<sup>14</sup> Both corruption and anti-corruption efforts in the South were linked to the advancement of white supremacy (Du Bois, 1935; McLaughlin-Stonham, 2020). They may have been used to justify voter suppression, election tampering, and anti-Black violence prior to the enactment of suffrage reforms.<sup>15</sup> Table A1 in the appendix to this paper includes a number of examples of corruption and Black voters found in Southern newspapers that were published around the years in which legal suffrage reforms were enacted.

### *2B. Anti-Black propaganda and the disenfranchising conventions*

Six Southern states adopted new state constitutions to restrict voting after 1890. The adoption of new constitutions was, in most cases, preceded by a constitutional convention. The demand for new constitutions was driven by different political factions. For Populists and some Republicans, new constitutions were seen as a path to include social and economic reforms (Kousser, 1974). However, for others, they were used to consolidate power behind certain factions within the Democratic Party. By the 1890s, a growing bipartisan consensus for a convention in several Southern states resulted in a shift towards focusing the conventions on suffrage reforms by elite Democrats.

Earlier failures to establish conventions reflected divisions over the purpose of new constitutions. In Virginia, there were two failed public referendums in 1888 and 1897 to proceed with a convention before the successful vote in 1900.<sup>16</sup> The 1897 referendum was advanced by pressure from Populists and the agrarian wing of the Democratic Party (Poindexter, 1927; McDanel, 1928; Holt, 1968; Holt, 1990). In Alabama, the legislature passed resolutions calling for a convention that, ultimately, failed to advance to a vote in 1897 and

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<sup>14</sup> Carter Glass, the author of many of the policies to disenfranchise Blacks that were included in the 1902 Virginia constitution, called the enfranchisement of Black men “a crime” and a “wretched failure to the end” (Dabney, 1971 pp. 436). Holt (1968) also mentions in the context of Virginia that “although the Democrats at times seemed to court the Negro vote, their biggest single weapon was the specter of black control of government, which they raised at every opportunity.”

<sup>15</sup> There were acts of legal and extralegal voter suppression prior to suffrage changes that occurred around 1900. See Key (1949) for a general discussion. McDanel (1928, p. 18) suggests that in Virginian counties where Blacks threatened white control or where Blacks were “an excuse for election fraud was there a real desire to disfranchise him legally.” Further, also in Virginia, the General Assembly enacted the Anderson-McCormick Act (1884) and the Walton Act (1894) both intended to suppress Black voters prior to the enactment of suffrage reforms (Tarter, 2019).

<sup>16</sup>The 1888 referendum was predetermined by the 1870 Constitution (Virginia Constitution of 1870, Title XII) and was overwhelming defeated with 94 percent voting against a constitutional convention.

1898. In Mississippi, a resolution calling for a convention passed the House in 1886 and the entire legislature two years later before being vetoed by the governor (Kousser, 1974).

The events culminating with successful conventions were slightly different in each state.<sup>17</sup> However, similarities did exist. Each involved legal and extralegal methods intended to rig the ballot in favor of suffrage reforms to disenfranchise Blacks (Kousser, 1974). They also involved propaganda disseminated by the Democratic press intended to sway the convention towards a focus on suffrage reforms. The evolution of support for a convention in Virginia, which can be uniquely identified through public support for referendums on a convention, provides a case study illustrating the role of anti-Black propaganda in supporting disenfranchisement, suppressing the vote, encouraging anti-Black violence, and channeling what to an outsider may have appeared to be populist rising to manipulate the system of elections to solidify power of the Democratic elite.<sup>18</sup>

In the early 1890s, Populists in Virginia favored revising the constitution so that election laws enacted during the 1880s might be reversed so as not to favor Democrats.<sup>19</sup> Republicans feared that any revisions would disenfranchise Black voters and thus did not support a convention. Meanwhile, Democrats were divided. Some Democrats sided with Populists on the national issue of “free silver.” These Democrats also supported reducing the electorate to win intraparty debates on economic issues and to sway the electorate more generally towards their own interests (Holt, 1968). The Democratic elite, backed by railroad and other business interests, feared a Republican-Populist coalition, like that in North Carolina and Louisiana, which could have forced its own agenda on the convention. These Democrats also tended to see earlier election laws suppressing the Black vote as being effective enough to maintain their power (Poindexter, 1928).

The 1897 referendum, however, failed even with bipartisan support (see Table A1 in the appendix). In addition, turnout for the referendum was very low despite being backed by newspapers affiliated with the Democratic Party (see Table A2 in the appendix).<sup>20</sup> Only nine

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<sup>17</sup> See Kousser (1974) chapter 6 on the “Disenfranchising Conventions.”

<sup>18</sup> Prince (2014) discusses the use of propaganda during the 1890s as an attempt by white supremacists in the South to create a defensive posture out of anti-Black violence, segregation, and discrimination. This Southern propaganda was also printed by the Northern press, published by Northern printers, and accepted by Northern intellectuals. Link (1981) points out that despite earlier historical accounts suggesting that elite Democrats did not support disenfranchisement at the time of the conventions, there is overwhelming evidence suggesting that suffrage reforms adopted in 1902 were fully endorsed by these elites with the idea of consolidating power.

<sup>19</sup> See Tarter (2019) for discussion of legal changes before 1901 that effectively disenfranchised Black voters such as the Anderson-McCormick Act (1884).

<sup>20</sup> Poindexter (1927) contends that the “only important” Democratic paper in the state to oppose the convention in 1897 was the Richmond Dispatch.

percent of eligible voters and 13 of the counties supported the constitutional convention.<sup>21</sup> Further, counties supporting the referendum were predominantly Black, where whites had strongly supported disenfranchisement (Poindexter, 1927; Kousser, 1974).

The political dynamics changed in several important ways after the 1897 referendum. First, Republicans and Populists won legal cases over the constitutional merits of contested elections (Kousser, 1974). Second, Populist issues that divided the Democratic Party were no longer an internal threat (Holt, 1968; Kousser, 1974). These changes created the opportunity for the Democratic elite who had supported Black disenfranchisement to support a convention to solidify power without threatening their own position on economic issues.

The Democratic position was supported by an increase in anti-Black propaganda in the press.<sup>22</sup> However, anti-Black propaganda would spread throughout the South during the 1890s as justification for segregation, disenfranchisement, voter suppression, and anti-Black violence. As Prince (2014, pp. 211) suggests, “disenfranchisement necessitated the amending of state constitutions; segregation demanded the reordering of urban space; spectacle lynching required mob coordination and planning,” and linked this all together was a propaganda attempting to put whites on the defensive as “proximity to an inferior race constituted a clear and present danger.”

The largest shifts in support for the 1897 and 1900 referendums were in predominantly white and urban jurisdictions (see Table A3 in the appendix). This supports the historical account of changes that motivated voters to the polls in support of the convention in 1900. The rest of this paper explores the importance of anti-Black propaganda in providing that motivation.

### 3. Hypothesis Development

There are several channels by which insinuations of corruption may have affected election outcomes. Figure 1 helps conceptualize these channels with each numbered for referral throughout the text. The figure begins with references to corruption either directly influencing policies intended to disenfranchise Black voters (illustrated by channel 1) or by encouraging negative sentiment (channel 2). Additional negative sentiment may have motivated a series of actions that would ultimately result in the legal disenfranchisement Blacks (channels 3 and 4),

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<sup>21</sup> This estimate was calculated by the author using the number of estimated potential voters from Clubb et al. (2006) and information on votes cast from the Virginia State Senate Journal (1897, pp. 76-77).

<sup>22</sup> This could initially be seen in the Democratic “silverite press” that, according to Poindexter (1927), “caused many men to look no further than this standing source of anxiety, and to shut their eyes and vote blindly for the party that would ‘down the nigger.’”

as reviewed by Kousser (1974), or extralegal actions (channels 5 and 7, 6 and 8, or 6 and 9) that suppressed the Black vote in advance of legal disenfranchisement, as reviewed by Key (1949). Further, both Kousser (1974) and Key (1949) have suggested that these actions influenced voter turnout, vote share, and election outcomes (illustrated by combinations of channels 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12).<sup>23</sup>

[Insert Figure 1 here]

There is also evidence that voter intimidation acted to suppress political participation (Jones et al., 2012). This is illustrated by following channels 2, 5, and 7, where insinuations of corruption provoked violence against Blacks to prevent Black voting to reduce turnout. The insinuations may have also motivated white voters to the polls, which may have increased turnout (channels 2, 6, 8). References to corruption and Black voters may also be related to instances of voter fraud that we know was present from the historical literature (channels 2, 5, 7).<sup>24</sup> Instances of voter fraud are not easily distinguishable from legitimate voting. This suggests that voter turnout may be, at best, an indication of motivation – to legally cast a ballot, illegally commit fraud, or provoke violence – unless some distinguishing anomaly is present.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, the important point is that there are several ways in which insinuations may have affected turnout in either direction.

The effects on vote share for candidates representing different parties are slightly less ambiguous, although still complicated by the fact that turnout was closely tied to vote share for Democratic candidates (Besley and Case, 2003; Naidu, 2012; Cooper et al., 2016). However, it might be concluded from Du Bois (1935) that insinuations of corruption were purposeful attempts to build a case against Black voters, and this may have either explicitly or implicitly

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<sup>23</sup> The literature examining the effects of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA), which restricted states from engaging in racial discrimination using literacy tests and poll taxes, also supports the notion that legal reforms affected election outcomes (Filer et al., 1991; Cascio and Washington, 2014).

<sup>24</sup> There are several reports that Southern Democrats used bribery throughout the period (Cooper et al., 2016). Malcolm Patterson, a Democratic congressman from Tennessee (and future governor of the state), publicly addressed Confederate veterans in 1903 by saying that “[w]e have been compelled to resort to questionable measures, often to force and fraud at the polls, as the only remedies and as the only means of escape from the greater evils of negro rule” (*The Marion County News*, Hamilton, Alabama, 13 August 2019, Thursday, page 6.)

<sup>25</sup> Kousser (1974) points out instances where white registrations prior to elections was greater than the number of possible voters which is indicative of fraud. Bertocchi and Dimico (2017) also find evidence of white registrations exceeding 100 percent in Mississippi during the period from 1896 to 1899. Using data from Clubb et al. (2006), I find that total voters exceeded estimated voters (i.e., voter turnout exceeded 100 percent) in 1.8 percent of Southern counties during the 1870s, 0.6 percent during the 1880s, 0.5 percent during the 1890s, and 0.1 percent during the 1900s. In other words, as policies intended to disenfranchise Black voters increased in prevalence, the likelihood of detecting fraud by using this metric likely also decreases.

motivated voters to suppress the influence of the Black vote by encouraging white turnout, violence against Blacks, or fraud (channels 7 and 10, 8 and 10, or 9). Furthermore, these elections were determined by plurality voting, whereby winning elections did not require candidates to secure a majority of the votes but rather, a greater share of the votes relative to other candidates.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, Democrats could win elections by suppressing support for biracial coalitions or by splitting the white vote among parties that competed with Democrats through the distribution of racist propaganda, assuming this propaganda had appeal (channel 9).

The theoretical ambiguity associated with the direction of the effects reflected by these channels is further illustrated by the literature on the political economy of media bias. In a competitive media environment, audience sorting dampens the effectiveness of media bias on electoral outcomes because voters tend to consume media that reflects their own perspectives (Durante and Knight, 2012). In a way, the consumption of biased news in a competitive environment may not actually be detrimental for political accountability (Prat and Strömberg, 2013). Meanwhile, even biased sources can accurately cover issues that are damaging for those to whom they are ideologically aligned (Puglisi and Snyder, 2011). This may be because they continue to care about their own reputation in conveying accuracy (Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2010).

Southern newspaper readers would also have expected a baseline level of “negative news” about Black voters that would have varied by newspaper, where the paper was published, and even over time. This might dampen the effects of increases, especially small or gradual increases, in the number of insinuations on electoral outcomes. Further, more negative news might be expected during election years and especially during competitive elections if newspapers were intending to influence elections.

This conjecture is supported by several studies suggesting that the expectations of consumers can affect election outcomes. Bernhardt et al. (2008) develop a model where news consumers receive a higher utility from reading news that they agree with, which includes positive news on candidates who they favor and negative news on candidates who they do not. The first type of “mistake” would occur if too much voting happens along party lines and each group of news consumers is only reading the good news about their own candidates and the bad news about others. The second type of “mistake” would occur if the actual amount of

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<sup>26</sup> Eggers (2015) has found that plurality voting can reduce turnout in non-competitive elections as the incentive to vote for a candidate is not as high as in other voting systems such as proportional representation. At the same time, the incentive for challengers to enter also is not as high as in other voting systems.

negative news for each candidate is less than the expected which may result in too much cross-over voting. Both “electoral mistakes” occur because voters with explicit preferences choose to listen to biased media who support their preferences. This is consistent with other studies that have suggested demand for certain news coverage is influential in shaping media bias, but also that exposure to certain news is important to driving political support (Mallainathan and Shleifer, 2005; Gerber et al., 2009; Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2010; Gentzkow et al., 2014).

The relationships illustrated in Figure 1 allow me to hypothesize that references to corruption in newspapers affected election outcomes through several channels. Specifically, if anti-Black propaganda had a measurable effect on election outcomes, we might find evidence of either additional support for Democratic politicians or the vote being split against the Democratic Party in advance of successful constitutional conventions. Also, potential voters would expect some level of baseline anti-Black propaganda from Democratic newspapers. Therefore, larger changes relative to the average level of propaganda may have been important. Finally, voter turnout could be affected in either direction as anti-Black propaganda may have encouraged white turnout or encouraged the suppression of Black voters.

#### 4. Empirical Strategy

In this section, I turn to an extension of an approach used by Gentzkow et al. (2011) to estimate the effects of newspaper entry into a market on election outcomes. However, rather than modeling election outcomes as a function of newspaper entry, my primary independent variable is the number of references to corruption and Black voting. My primary dependent variables include total voters and voter turnout in congressional elections. I also study the effect of vote share for Democratic Party candidates as well as candidates who may represent competition for Democrats in congressional elections – Republicans and Populists. The basic model is:

$$y_{cst} = \rho_c + \beta \kappa_{cst} + \theta X_{cst} + \gamma_{cst} + \varpi_t + \varepsilon_{cst}, \quad (1)$$

where  $y$  is an election outcome (e.g., total voters, turnout, or vote share) in county “c” and state “s” in a year “t.”  $\rho$  is the county effect.  $\kappa$  is the number of references to corruption and Black voting in newspapers published in a county “c” and state “s” in a year “t.”  $X$  includes a number of controls for population as well as local economic conditions,  $\varpi$  is a variable representing a presidential election year, and  $\gamma$  includes fixed effects for state and year.

Similar to Gentzkow et al. (2011), I estimate the model in first differences given the persistence in election outcomes, and, as per Bertrand et al. (2004), I cluster standard errors at

the county level because the intensity of the treatment varies by county.<sup>27</sup> The estimating equation is:

$$\Delta y_{cst} = \beta \Delta K_{cst} + \theta \Delta X_{cst} + \Delta \gamma_{cst} + \Delta \varpi_t + \Delta \varepsilon_{cst}, \quad (2)$$

where  $\Delta$  is the first difference operator measuring the change between two subsequent congressional election years (e.g.,  $\Delta y_{cst} = y_{cst} - y_{cs(t-2)}$ ). Time invariant fixed effects are excluded because of differencing.<sup>28</sup>

[Insert Table 1 here]

My empirical strategy exploits differences in the timing of elections that were important to the adoption of new constitutions introducing changes in suffrage requirements intended to disenfranchise Black men (see Table 1). Between 1890 and 1902, six states adopted new constitutions that were intended to restrict Black voting: Mississippi (1890), South Carolina (1895), Louisiana (1898), North Carolina (1900), Alabama (1901), and Virginia (1902). Almost every state included called for a convention to draft a revised constitution that would be offered for adoption by all registered voters including Black men.<sup>29</sup> The only exception was North Carolina, where the legislature drafted the new constitution. In every state, the establishment of a convention, or constitutional draft in the case of North Carolina, originated with the state legislature or governor and, therefore, occurred after a critical initial election. This initial election was critical as it established the first hurdle in enacting suffrage reforms. That is, the election established a governing body that set-in motion the procedural requirements to revise the constitution.

The first procedural requirement to drafting a new constitution was the initiation of a convention with the enactment of a bill, passed by a state legislature, calling for a public referendum on drafting the new constitution. Once that referendum was adopted, the delegates of the conventions were selected directly by the voters or by the state legislature. The convention delegates in every state were overwhelming members of the Democratic Party. For

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<sup>27</sup> Wooldridge (2002) recommends estimating linear panel models in first differences rather than fixed effects when serial correlation is present which we would suspect given the nature of the data on elections. I confirm this using the Wooldridge (2002) test for serial correlation in linear panel data. I can strongly reject the null hypothesis of no serial correlation for total voters, voter turnout, Democratic vote share, Populist vote share, and Republican Party equivalent vote share. See Drukker (2003) for Stata commands and examples in using Wooldridge's test.

<sup>28</sup> Taking the first difference also mitigates spatial autocorrelation that may be result of a fixed effect associated with a county (e.g., the difference between two or more geographic points) because the fixed effect is differenced out.

<sup>29</sup> Black participation in these elections was low due to voter suppression, fraud, and other techniques used to reduce the impact of Black voters (Kousser, 1974).



instance, 88 of the 100 delegates in Virginia, 141 of the 150 in Alabama, and 154 of the 160 in South Carolina were Democrats. The conventions themselves were also transparent in their mission to establish white supremacy through the legal disenfranchisement of Black men and other reforms, such as limitations on establishing new jurisdictions and local rule (Woodward, 1951; Kousser, 1974).<sup>30</sup>

[Insert Table 2 here]

The differences in timing of these events – the initial election establishing the state legislature responsible for drafting the public referendum, the public referendum calling for a convention, the convention, and the adoption of the constitution – allows me to establish two critical election periods that were important to the development of the new state constitutions (see Table 2). The first critical election period includes the two elections preceding the convention (e.g., for Louisiana this would be 1894 and 1896). The second critical election period includes the election in the year the constitution was adopted and the preceding election (e.g., for Louisiana this would be 1896 and 1898).<sup>31</sup>

## 5. Data

### 5A. Defining and sourcing corruption and Black voting

This section defines the measure of corruption and Black voting reflected in newspapers which is denoted by  $\kappa_{\text{cst}}$  in equation (1). As discussed in Section 2, there were a number of terms that were used interchangeably in newspapers to refer to Black corruption. These included the threat of “negro rule,” “negroism,” “ballot box stuffing,” “negro scalawag,” “negro carpetbag,” and “negro vote buying.” Many of these articles also included some combination of the words

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<sup>30</sup> The president of Alabama’s constitutional convention was John Knox who, in his opening address, was very clear about this point saying, “And what is it that we want to do? Why, it is, within limits imposed by the Federal Constitution, to establish white supremacy in this State.... But if we would have white supremacy, we must establish it by law – not by force or fraud.” (*Journal of the Proceedings of the Constitutional Convention*, 1901, pp. 9)

<sup>31</sup> The reason for including periods with two election years is to allow for any change that might have occurred before and after the initial election and the election in the constitutional adoption year. In other words, I am interested in any change between the election that mattered in establishing the procedural motions for revising the constitution and the prior election. In the case of the second election period, both elections often mattered in the sense that they were necessary towards establishing suffrage reforms. However, this method allows me to compare the effects between the election that preceded the constitutional convention (or draft) and adoption.

“corrupt,” “corruption,” and “negro,” but also “ignorant,” “lazy,” and “dishonest,” in an attempt to label Black voters as the source of public corruption in the South.

There is no perfect way to capture all references to corruption and Black voters. Rather, it is important to define some proxy that can reflect the trends that are generally present through these insinuations. In an attempt to capture the most encompassing definition possible, I use the search term “corrupt + negro vote” to construct  $\kappa_{cst}$ , where  $\kappa$  is the total count of “corrupt + negro vote” in newspapers published in county “c” and state “s” in a year “t.” I use total count, rather than some other measure of the number of references, in an attempt to capture the intensity of the term based on the assumption that the number of times someone may have been exposed to these insinuations was more important than whether they were ever exposed. This is a similar justification to that of Gentzkow et al. (2011), whose variable of interest is the total number of newspapers and not just exposure to any paper.

It is also possible that the search term “corrupt + negro vote” captures more than just insinuations to Black voters being corrupt. For instance, it may capture references to actual corruption, including in Northern states being reported in Southern newspapers. However, as W.E.B. Du Bois suggested in the quote found at the beginning of this paper, even these insinuations were important to connecting Southern corruption and Northern corruption, while also inferring that Southern corruption was the result of Black voters and Northern politicians. Therefore, inclusion of the references would be expected as part of the propaganda effort.

[Insert Figure 2 here]

I use *Newspapers.com* to collect source material to estimate the extent of references. *Newspapers.com* is an online archive of historical newspapers with built-in Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software that can be used to create an index of various search terms. Between 1865 and 1920, there were over 63,100 references to “corrupt + negro vote” within the same page printed in Southern newspapers that are included within the *Newspapers.com* archive.<sup>32</sup> To determine whether the search term “corrupt + negro vote” accurately reflects

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<sup>32</sup> I also compare the *Newspapers.com* data to an identical search for “corrupt + negro vote” using the Library of Congress’s *Chronicling America* (LOC-CA) database of historical newspapers during the critical election periods, or 1886 to 1902. Rather than producing total count of the use of terms, the LOC-CA search produces a number of newspaper pages where the search term “corrupt + negro vote” is reflected. Another significant difference between *Newspapers.com* and LOC-CA is that the former is much larger in terms of content with almost 40 times more digitized pages.<sup>32</sup> Further, the vast majority of the papers included in the LOC-CA archive are also included in the *Newspapers.com* archive.<sup>32</sup> Figure A1 in the appendix plots the comparison. I find that the correlation between the two series is 0.756 suggesting that the *Newspapers.com* series generally reflects what one would find using

trends that would be present in other definitions of corruption and Black voting, I also compare it to search terms for “negro rule,” “negro ballot box stuff,” “negro carpetbag,” and “negro scalawag” during the years covering the critical election periods above. Figure 2 shows the results of this comparison with the trend in references to “corrupt + negro vote” closely related to other search terms that were also used to target white voters.<sup>33</sup>

[Insert Table 3 here]

Table 3 shows the correlations between “corrupt + negro vote” and other possible search terms. There is a high correlation (above 70 percent) between the “corrupt + negro vote” and other terms that the historical literature has suggested capture insinuations of Black influence on public corruption. “Negro scalawag” has a lower correlation, in part, because the term was used consistently over the period although used more extensively during Reconstruction.<sup>34</sup> In general, however, these results should provide confidence in using “corrupt + negro vote” as a proxy for references to corruption and Black voting in the model as  $\kappa$ .

[Insert Figure 3 here]

The model presented in equation (1) includes only references to corruption and Black voters in election years. References outside of election years are excluded as they are assumed to be less important than those in election years in terms of driving election outcomes.<sup>35</sup> However, comparing the references in election and non-election years within the same two-year election cycle may help in establishing additional credibility that these references reflect political propaganda rather than actual acts of corruption. For example, if insinuations of corruption and Black voters reflected actual acts of public corruption, we might assume that they would be as prevalent in non-election years as they are in election years within the same cycle. Also, as

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other sources and methods for counting search terms for “corrupt + negro vote.” Nevertheless, the size and scope of the *Newspapers.com* archive motivated my choice to use this database rather than the LOC-CA archive.

<sup>33</sup>Foner (1988) writes “So ingrained was the old racist version of Reconstruction that it took an entire decade of scholarship to prove the essentially negative contentions that ‘Negro rule’ was a myth and that Reconstruction represented more than ‘the blackout of honest government.’”

<sup>34</sup> Donald (1944) suggests that “scalawag” was used to refer to wealthy Whig planters who became Republican after the Civil War. Trelease (1963) tracks the evolution of “scalawag” over time suggesting it was used to label “a Southerner who supported the Congressional plan of reconstruction,” or a Southern Republican, but eventually came to mean a “traitor to [the white] race” and “disloyalty, cowardice, greed, or lust for power.”

<sup>35</sup> I assume that voters adjusted their expectations to be exposed to more references to anti-Black propaganda in election years. Therefore, the appropriate base level of corruption accusations would include only election years.

discussed above, if references were intended to influence elections, we might assume a greater number of references during election years due to the baseline expectation of readers for anti-Black statements. Figure 3 plots references to “corrupt + negro vote” in election and non-election years within the same cycle from 1865-1866 until 1919-1920, where each point along the horizontal axis reflects the two-year election cycle. The election year references are reflected by the solid line whereas the non-election year references are reflected as the dashed line within the same election cycle. The difference between the lines at any given time interval reflected along the horizontal axis shows that references in election years are consistently higher than non-election years.

On average, election year references are 65 percent higher than non-election year references. However, the three smallest differences during an election cycle before World War I are eventful. The first occurs immediately after the end of Reconstruction (1877-1878) where non-election year references were 8 percent higher than in the election year. The second occurs in the first election post-Reconstruction when every Southern state had a Democratic governor and legislature (1885-1886), and when election year references were only 17 percent higher than non-election year references having fallen from 107 percent in the previous cycle. Finally, in the cycle immediately after many of the Southern states had adopted new constitutions to disenfranchise Black voters (1903-1904), election year references fell to only be 4 percent higher than non-election year references. Each of these periods would have followed significant political victories by the Democratic Party thereby further supporting the case of a political election cycle to references of “corrupt + negro vote.”

### *5B. Defining and sourcing election outcomes and other county-level data*

The dependent variable,  $y$ , reflects election outcomes such as voter turnout and vote share for candidates representing different political parties. In an ideal world, we would have data for election outcomes that directly affected the suffrage reforms. In most cases, this would include election outcomes for representatives in the state legislature (e.g., members of the House, delegates, or senators) or delegates elected directly to the constitutional conventions. Although we know who won the election, we do not have data on vote share at any level for any consistent period of time. However, we do have estimates of election outcomes at the county level for federal elections which I use as a proxy for election outcomes. Specifically, the data on federal elections used in this paper is from Clubb et al. (2006). The validity of this proxy assumes that voters in a county generally supported candidates at both the state and federal level who

represented the same party. The estimate of turnout in federal elections is likely to be robust given that elections for many political offices occurred at the same time.

Unfortunately, county level election outcomes are missing for Mississippi during the critical election period. Specifically, data are not available for 1888 (the election year preceding the adoption of the constitution) as well as for 1890 (the year of constitutional adoption). Therefore, I exclude Mississippi from my sample when analyzing the critical election periods. I do not have any reason to believe that this would significantly affect the outcomes.

[Insert Table 4 here]

The model also assumes that economic and population changes will affect county level voting behavior. This is based on other studies suggesting the presence of a relationship between income and voting patterns (Blais, 2006; Leighley and Nagler, 2013; Scholozman et al., 2018). Furthermore, given the importance of the relationship between political representation and disenfranchisement to the questions assessed in this paper, I control for the percent of the Black population living in a county including a quadratic term in the event of a nonlinear relationship. Population is also a significant factor in determining the number of newspapers at any time given the fixed costs associated with publishing (Gentzkow et al., 2011). Therefore, population growth may be associated with election outcomes and the number of references by influencing the number of publications. County level demographic and economic data is from Haines and ICPSR (2010); however, this data is only available every 10 years due to the timing of the Census which is the source of the information. Therefore, I construct demographic and economic control variables, such as estimated population, by linearly interpolating between the values that are known.<sup>36</sup> A full set of variables is described in the data appendix. Summary statistics for the variables that are used to estimate the model are included in Table 4.

The sample includes only counties where at least one newspaper was both published during the period and is included in the *Newspapers.com* archive. Although the *Newspapers.com* archive is extensive, it does not include every paper published. Therefore, including counties that do not have newspapers in the archive would likely introduce “false negatives” into the

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<sup>36</sup> The advantage of this method is that it allows me to account for demographic and economic change using information collected from the entire population. However, by assuming that the trends are constant, one risk to this method is that it can result in inaccurate demographic compositions. This has shown to be a problem elsewhere, such as in Ireland during the decade covering the 1918 flu pandemic (Colvin and McLaughlin, 2021).

sample. I do, however, compare counties where a newspaper was published and included in the archive with those that are not included in the archive. Counties not represented in the archive are less likely to have urban populations (5 percent relative to 13 percent), fewer total voters (about 46 percent fewer voters on average), and a smaller Black population (27 compared to 37 percent). In other words, they are more likely to be rural communities without large population centers. However, they are not meaningfully different in any other way. Given these differences, and the association between newspapers and population, it may be that these counties did not have newspapers and that is why they are not included. Still, it is difficult to know without a comprehensive database of published newspapers which, to my knowledge, is unavailable.

## 6. Evaluating the empirical strategy

Before moving to estimate the parameters of the model, I first evaluate the empirical strategy using the definition of  $\kappa$ , references to “corrupt + negro vote,” described above. The importance of the two critical election periods used in my empirical strategy can be conveyed graphically. For example, Figure 4 shows the number of references to “corrupt + negro vote” in newspapers published in Louisiana, Virginia, and North Carolina, compared to the average for every other Southern state. The three states were chosen given the sequential timing of the reforms. There is a sharp increase in the number of references in each state during the critical election periods. For all three states, a sharp increase occurs during the initial critical election period (denoted by “1st CEP” in Figure 6). In Louisiana, references then decline after this initial election, whereas for Virginia and North Carolina, references plateau until the adoption of the new constitution and then decrease steeply.<sup>37</sup>

[Insert Figure 4 here]

The importance of these periods is also conveyed by comparing the prevalence of anti-Black propaganda around earlier efforts to establish conventions amending Southern

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<sup>37</sup> Mapping changes in the variation in the number of references within counties also illustrates the importance of critical election periods. A map of every Southern state is in Figure A1 in the appendix. The blue colors reflect references below 125 percent of the average over the period with the deepest blue reflecting references well below average (zero references to 50 percent below average). Red colors reflect at least 125 higher than average with the deepest red reflecting at least 5 times the average. In the year of the first critical election and adoption of the constitution, the number of references in many counties increases considerably relative to the long-run average within the county before decreasing post-event.

constitutions with the purpose of amending suffrage reforms. Section 2 discusses the background on two failed referendums to establish a constitutional convention in Virginia prior to the successful referendum. The example of Virginia was unique in that there were public referendums to revise the constitution that failed twice before the successful vote passed. This allows me to examine the circumstances leading to the failed and successful public referendums including the prevalence of propaganda.

Figure 5 shows instances of “corrupt + negro vote” in Virginian newspapers during the period covering the three referendums. The dates of the three referendums are delineated by the three vertical lines. The two dashed lines mark the failed votes whereas the solid line marks the successful vote in 1900. References to “corrupt + negro” vote increased considerably in newspapers affiliated with the Democratic Party before the adopted referendum but not before the two failed referendums. Figure 6 shows monthly references to “corrupt + negro vote” in Virginian newspapers before and after the 1897 and 1900 referendums, along with the number of monthly references during the convention (June 1901 – June 1902) as well as before and after the adoption of the new constitution (July 1902). The figure shows an increase in references in the months preceding the 1900 referendum vote as well as during the convention and around the time the new constitution was adopted.

[Insert Figures 5 and 6 here]

It is also important to my empirical strategy that most of the newspaper references occurred before the elections that they may have influenced. This is because it attempts to estimate the extent of a causal relationship between  $\Delta\kappa_{cst}$  and  $\Delta y_{cst}$  which would be invalidated if all the instances of  $\kappa_{cst}$  occurred after the election where  $y_{cst}$  was decided. It is possible, for instance, that the newspapers were retrospectively reflecting on the election. However, I find that more than 90 percent of references in every state took place before the elections.

The empirical strategy also assumes that  $\Delta\kappa_{cst}$  is not correlated with previous values of  $\Delta y_{cst}$ . However, if a relationship between election outcomes and newspaper references of corruption is driven by omitted variables, it is possible that previous values of  $\Delta y_{cst}$  may be correlated with  $\Delta\kappa_{cst}$  (Gentzkow et al., 2011). For instance, it may be the case that newspapers published in counties that have, historically, had changes in certain election outcomes (e.g., larger support for Democratic candidates) may be more likely to publish content to support the

past decisions of their readers. We can test for the presence of bias associated with pre-trends by estimating the equation,

$$\Delta y_{cst} = \sum_{n=-5}^5 \beta^n \Delta \kappa_{cst} + \theta \Delta X_{cst} + \Delta \gamma_{cst} + \Delta \varpi_t + \Delta \varepsilon_{cst}, \quad (3)$$

where  $y_{cst}$ , in this regression, is the total number of voters in a congressional election (Panel A) or the voter turnout in congressional elections (Panel B), which is a function of a vector of changes in the number of references over the last five congressional election years as well as the future five election years. The coefficients for  $\beta^n$  are plotted in Figure 7.

[Insert Figure 7 here]

Figure 7 shows that the change in the total number of votes and turnout is above average during the election year when newspaper references are published as well as during the next election cycle, or when  $n = 0$  or  $2$ , and then no longer significantly different from zero in any following year. However, the change in the total number of votes and turnout is not significantly different from zero before the references are published or when  $n < 0$ . This indicates that newspaper references to corruption and Black voters are associated with political outcomes in the years in which they are published.

## 7. The Effect of Anti-Black Propaganda on Election Outcomes

Estimating equation (2) measures the effect of  $\Delta \kappa_{cst}$ , changes in references to corruption and Black voters, on  $\Delta y_{cst}$ , election outcomes, which is the key relationship identified in the model discussed above. In this section, I define  $y_{cst}$  as the following election outcomes: (1) the number of total voters; (2) voter turnout or the number of total voters as a share of eligible voters; (3) the vote share for Democratic candidates; (4) the vote share for Republican candidates; and (5) the vote share for Populist candidates. Each dependent variable is log transformed and associated with the congressional election in county “c” and state “s” in an election year “t.”

There are a number of sources of potential bias influencing the outcomes associated with estimating equation (2). A significant source of bias is moderated using the identification strategy of focusing on critical elections, but there are other sources as well. For instance, as discussed in Section 3, we would expect that demographic and economic characteristics would have an effect on election outcomes. However, the elections occur every two years and county level characteristics are available only every 10 years given the timing of the Census. The strategy that I use to impute values between Census years could fail to reflect any annual



changes that may influence election year changes. This is mitigated by including state and year fixed effects.

However, outward Black migration from the South is known to have affected election outcomes in both Northern and Southern states (Calderon et al., 2020). That said, I expect the bias from unmeasured migration shocks to be small, in part, due to focusing on the period before the start of the Great Migration (circa 1916) when millions of Black Americans moved from the rural South to cities in the North and West (Collins, 2020). Longer term trends in migration should mostly be captured in estimates of changes in the percentage of the Black population and population growth. Furthermore, the bias associated with unmeasured income shocks is likely small and largely addressed by controlling for population growth as illustrated by Gentzkow et al. (2011). The robustness of the main results to these sources of bias are also examined below.

#### *7A. Baseline Results*

As discussed, the results of estimating equation (2) on the entire sample, which includes all congressional elections between 1870-1920, are likely influenced by reverse causality. We would expect that newspaper references to corruption and Black voters would decline following the enactment of suffrage reforms which would have reduced turnout, the number of total voters, and increased vote share for Democratic candidates. Therefore, I turn to results using the identification strategy of focusing on critical elections which is intended to avoid any bias associated with reverse causality. However, the results for the entire sample are included in Table A5 in the appendix.

[Insert Table 5 here]

Table 5 presents the results of estimating equation (2) on the first critical election period (full results are in Table A6 of the appendix). The results show that on average a change in the number of references to “corrupt + negro vote” has a significant effect on a number of election outcomes. “Standardized  $\beta$ ” shows the coefficient for “corrupt + negro vote” when both the dependent and independent variables have been standardized to have a mean value of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. On average, a one standard deviation increase in references to corruption is associated with 9 percent of a standard deviation increase in both total voters and turnout. Further, a one standard deviation increase in references to corruption is associated with 38 percent and 12 percent of a standard deviation increase in the log vote share for Populists

and Republicans, respectively. Referring back to Table 4, this suggests that, on average, an increase in roughly 20 additional references to corruption and Black voting is associated with an increase in voter turnout by about 3 percentage points, an increase in the Populist vote share by about 6 percentage points, and an increase in the Republican vote share by about 3 percentage points. There is no effect on Democratic vote share.

Overall, this is evidence that insinuations of public corruption and Black voters motivated voters to the polls but was also associated with splitting the vote against Democrats in advance of the first election establishing the conditions for constitutional reforms. Specifically, the insinuations increased vote share for Populist candidates relative to Republicans, which is noteworthy as both parties were initially biracial, though Southern Populists never advocated for social or economic equality (Woodward, 1951; Goodwyn, 1976). In some places, the Populist Party was just as supportive of the policies of white supremacy as Democrats (Woodward, 1973).

[Insert Table 6]

Table 6 presents the results of estimating equation (2) on the second critical election period (full results are in Table A7 of the appendix). The results show that, on average, a one standard deviation in corruption references is associated with 12 percent of a standard deviation increase in total voters and turnout. Further, a one standard deviation in corruption references is associated with 14 percent of a standard deviation increase in the log vote share for Populists. A one standard deviation increase in corruption is also associated with 5 percent of a deviation decrease in the log vote share for Democrats. There is no effect on Republican vote share. In other words, an increase in roughly 30 additional references to corruption is associated with a 3-percentage point increase in turnout, a 2-percentage point increase in Populist vote share, and less than a 1 percentage point reduction in Democratic vote share. Similar to the results above, this is also evidence that insinuations of public corruption motivated voters to support Populists thereby reducing the likelihood that a biracial coalition would threaten Democratic Party candidates in advance of adopting a new constitution.

The effect on election outcomes may also be dependent on the magnitude of changes in exposure to corruption references. That is, small deviations in the number of references to corruption may be less important than large deviations if newspaper readers were regularly exposed to anti-Black propaganda. This is similar to a hypothesis proposed by Bernhardt et al. (2008) in that reader conditioning to media bias may influence the effect of exposure. To

evaluate this conjecture, I substitute the primary independent variable of interest in equation (2),  $\kappa_{\text{cst}}$ , for a series of variables indicating exposure to corruption references above the 75th, 90th, 95th, and 99th percentiles of references within the county over the period from 1870 to 1920. If the references exceed the specified threshold, the variable takes the value of 1 and is otherwise 0. Standardized coefficients for the dependent variables are presented in Table 7.<sup>38</sup>

[Insert Table 7 here]

The results in Table 7 indicate that there are certain instances in which the magnitude of exposure influenced election outcomes. For instance, an increase from below to above the 90th percentile in references during the first critical election period is not associated with any significant change in voter turnout. However, exceeding the 95th and 99th percentile is associated with, on average, 33 and 44 percent of a standard deviation increase in voter turnout. The results for both voter turnout and total voters in Panels A and B also demonstrate that the effect size increases from a third to around half a standard deviation as the magnitude of references increases. Furthermore, exceeding the 75th percentile for corruption references in the first critical election period is associated with almost a standard deviation increase in log vote share for Populists, while exceeding the 95th percentile is associated with almost a standard deviation and a half increase. In the second critical election period, exceeding the 95th or 99th percentile is associated with around a quarter of a standard deviation decrease in Democratic vote share.

### *7B. Additional Results*

The section above presents estimates of  $\beta$ , the coefficient associated with changes in references to “corrupt + negro vote” on election outcomes, having controlled for a number of other factors that may influence elections such as demographic and economic changes. I have also argued that the mismeasurement of those controls, represented by  $X_{\text{cst}}$  in equation (2), may affect  $\beta$ . Table A8 in the appendix presents estimates of  $\beta$  on different election outcomes excluding demographic controls, whereas Table A9 presents estimates of  $\beta$  excluding economic controls. Panels A and B in those tables represent the first and second critical election periods. State and year fixed effects are included in all regressions.

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<sup>38</sup> Only the dependent variable is standardized given that a standard deviation increase is not something that would happen with the indicator variables given their values of only 0 and 1.

The results suggest that excluding demographic and economic controls have a negligible impact on  $\beta$ . It is not surprising that demographic and economic factors exerted some influence on vote shares for Republicans and Populists given the close connection both parties had with certain regions, economies, and population groups. Republicans were generally the party of whites living in Appalachia and Blacks, whereas Populists were generally the party of farmers. Furthermore, economic controls explain 15 percent of the variation in Republican vote share whereas demographics explain 13 percent of the variation in Populist vote share.

The first differences operator in equation (2) eliminates county level fixed effects. This would mitigate the potential for spatial autocorrelation because the county level fixed effects included in equation (1),  $\rho_c$ , would include time invariant effects associated with a particular location including those associated with a county “c” and a neighboring county. However, these spatial effects may be interesting especially if corruption references in newspapers published in a county influence election outcome in neighboring counties. There are several reasons why this might be the case. First, it is likely that newspaper distribution extended beyond the county of publication to neighboring areas. Second, it is likely that there are similarities in populations within a given region that may include neighboring counties. Third, political information, including propaganda, can spread through social networks that may not share political boundaries. To determine the spatial effects, I augment equation (1) to include a spatial lag estimator,

$$y_{cst} = \lambda W\kappa_{cst} + \beta\kappa_{cst} + \theta X_{cst} + \gamma_{cst} + \varpi_t + \epsilon_{cst}, \quad (4)$$

where  $W$  is a positive  $N \times N$  spatial weights matrix to capture the potential spillover between contiguous counties derived from the location of counties during the first critical election period.  $W\kappa_{cst}$  denotes the interaction between corruption references and the spatial weighting matrix. The other variables are identical to those found in equation (1). In essence, the estimating equation allows me to evaluate how a change in corruption references in one county,  $\kappa_{cst}$ , influences election outcomes in that county as well as in neighboring counties.<sup>39</sup>

[Insert Table 8 here]

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<sup>39</sup> Equation (3) is estimated using a spatial autoregressive model (SAR). See LeSage and Pace (2009) for more discussion on spatial econometrics. Also see Drukker et al. (2013) on creating the spatial weights matrix.

Table 8 presents the direct and indirect, or spillover, effects of a change in  $\kappa_{\text{cst}}$  when  $y$  is voter turnout. Panels A and B represent the first and second critical election periods. The results suggest that the effect of references of corruption and Black voters on voter turnout is roughly the same size within a county where the newspaper is published as it is in neighboring counties during the first critical election period. During the second critical election period there is no effect on voter turnout within contiguous counties. One of the challenges of this analysis is that counties not in the *Newspapers.com* archive are coded as having no instances of references to corruption in newspapers. In reality, it is likely that those counties had newspapers that reported coverage similar to those within their region but are simply excluded from the archive. Therefore, it is important to be careful when interpreting the results, especially the spillover effects.

It is also possible that the results are driven by higher levels of anti-Black propaganda in counties where the Populist Party had been stronger historically. For instance, Ottinger and Winkler (2022) find that anti-Black propaganda, measured by instances of “rape AND negro” in newspapers throughout the South, increased in newspapers affiliated with the Democratic Party after the 1892 presidential election in counties where there was some support for the Populist Party candidate James Weaver. This may suggest that anti-Black propaganda was historically higher in counties where the Democratic Party had experienced credible competition. However, I do not find any statistically meaningful associations between the measure of anti-Black propaganda used in this paper (“corrupt + negro vote”) during the critical election periods and support for the Populist Party in 1892.<sup>40</sup> Even in South Carolina, where the first critical election period begins in 1892, the references to “corrupt + negro vote” do not peak until 1894 which is the year before the constitutional convention was convened.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> The correlation between the measure of anti-Black propaganda used in this paper (“corrupt + negro vote”) during the first and second critical election periods and the Populist vote share in the 1892 presidential election is 0.06 and 0.04, respectively. Neither are statistically different from zero at  $p < 0.05$ . Further, I estimated a model of the number of instances of “corrupt + negro vote” as a function of Populist vote share in 1892 and the threat of Populist candidates as measured by a vote share greater than zero in the 1892 presidential election (this is similar to the measure of Populist threat used by Ottinger and Winkler (2020)). I find no statistically significant relationship. Results are in Table A10.

<sup>41</sup> In South Carolina, references to “corrupt + negro vote” fell by 75 percent between 1892 and 1893. References then increased by nearly 500 percent between 1893 and 1894 and by 34 percent between 1894 and 1892. This is consistent with results presented elsewhere in this paper in that references peaked in election years and fell in non-election years.

## 8. Discussion

There are three main findings presented in this paper. First, anti-Black propaganda in newspapers was associated with increased voters and higher turnout among the voting population. Second, anti-Black propaganda was associated with higher vote share for Populist candidates, thereby indicating that the vote against Democrats was split in favor of a political party that never embraced social and economic equality for Blacks. Third, the relative magnitude of exposure to anti-Black propaganda has effects on election outcomes. Potential voters needed to be exposed to higher levels of anti-Black propaganda before it had statistically significant effects on election outcomes. All the results are applied to elections that occurred immediately prior to the adoption of new constitutions in Southern states that disenfranchised Black voters. While the results are not representative of every election during the period, these elections were especially important, as were the constitutional changes, in determining the course of state and national politics until at least the 1960s (Key, 1949; Kousser, 1974).

These results contribute to the understanding of the channels by which anti-Black propaganda was used to make the case for disenfranchisement. A substantial amount of the historical literature to date has focused on contextualizing the language used during the period by politicians, historians, and ordinary people. That is, determining how anti-Black sentiment was reflected in different media, such as newspapers and other forms of mass communication (e.g., plays and movies).<sup>42</sup> This paper measures the *impact* of insinuations of public corruption on consequential elections that resulted in the formal disenfranchisement of Black men in the South.

The findings challenge the notion that legal disenfranchisement was *fait accompli*, as submitted by Key (1949), prior to the adoption of the new state constitutions. At the same time, the outcomes of elections in advance of the adoption of the new constitutions did set in motion a series of events that culminated with the adoption of suffrage reforms. I present evidence consistent with the hypothesis that anti-Black propaganda could have been an important factor in determining the outcomes of these elections as it was associated with the splitting of the vote against the Democratic Party. This occurred even though vote share decreased for Democrats in the second critical election period as voter turnout and the number of overall voters increased. These results do not indicate an increase in the level of voter suppression *per se* but

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<sup>42</sup> There have recently been several papers in the economics literature on the impact of a 1915 film called *The Birth of a Nation*, which promoted the Lost Cause of the Confederacy as a historical account and depicted the Ku Klux Klan as heroic, on the diffusion of anti-Black violence and rhetoric (Ang 2020; Esposito et al., 2021).

rather that voters on both sides of the disenfranchisement issue understood the importance of these elections, which was reflected in their behavior.

The results add to the understanding of anti-Black sentiment in the post-Reconstruction South. Kousser (1974) points out that Populists considered Black Republicans to be corrupt. The findings support the notion that Populist voters responded to charges of public corruption involving Black voters. Woodward (1951; 2002) found that anti-Black sentiment dissipated once political competition for Democrats in the South was reduced following the disenfranchisement of Blacks. The finding that anti-Black sentiment is linked to political competition is also supported by Glaeser (2005) and Ottinger and Winkler (2022) who look at elections in the South during the 1890s. My results are consistent with these findings and suggest that propaganda was important to convincing whites not to support biracial coalitions that may have challenged the Democratic Party.

Finally, the results have implications for understanding the effects of political media coverage today. Several studies have suggested that exposure to different media views has affected voter behavior and therefore turnout, support for various political candidates, government policy, or violence against certain groups (Gerber et al., 2009; Gentzkow et al., 2011; Enikolopov et al., 2011; Gentzkow et al., 2014; Yanagizawa-Drott, 2014; Galvis et al., 2016; Ang, 2020; Masera et al. 2021). This paper supports those findings in a historical setting. However, it also demonstrates how the media's coverage of propaganda can have persistent effects on both our perceptions of the past and political outcomes. The elections influenced by anti-Black propaganda in the 1890s helped to build the case for disenfranchisement of Black men, which facilitated anti-democratic rule in the South until the 1960s. This coverage also influenced the public perception of Black voters, including through the mainstream historical literature, which reinforced the discriminatory policies of Jim Crow. Examining the effects that anti-Black propaganda had on the persistence of perception and discrimination is an avenue for further research.

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Table 1: Constitutional timelines in Southern States, 1890 to 1902

	Critical Initial Election	Convention Called	Convention Convened	Constitution Adopted
Alabama	1900	1901	1901	1901
Louisiana	1896	1898	1898	1898
Mississippi	1888	1890	1890	1890
North Carolina	1898	N/A	1899*	1900
South Carolina	1894	1895	1895	1895
Virginia	1898	1900	1901	1902

**Note:** \*Draft by legislation.

**Source:** The year of the constitutional adoption is from Keyssar (2000) but text from the constitutions is also available from the NBER/Maryland State Constitutions Project. The timing of the conventions is based on information from the official proceedings of the constitutional conventions in each state which marked the exact dates.

Table 2: Critical election periods

	First Critical Period	Second Critical Period
Alabama	1898 – 1900	N/A
Louisiana	1894 – 1896	1896 – 1898
Mississippi	1886 – 1888	N/A
North Carolina	1896 – 1898	1898 – 1900
South Carolina	1892 – 1894	N/A
Virginia	1898 – 1900	1900 – 1902

**Source:** Author.

Table 3: Correlations between different search terms for corruption and Black voting

	corrupt + negro vote	negro rule	negro ballot box stuff	negro carpetbag	negro scalawag
corrupt + negro vote	1.000				
negro rule	0.747	1.000			
negro ballot box stuff	0.780	0.423	1.000		
negro carpetbag	0.730	0.539	0.663	1.000	
negro scalawag	0.684	0.877	0.315	0.684	1.000

**Note:** All correlations with “corrupt + negro vote” are statistically significant at  $p < 0.5$ . Data corresponds with Figure 3.

**Source:** Author’s calculations using data from *Newspapers.com*.

Table 4: Summary Statistics

	Full Sample (1870-1920)		First Critical Election Period		Second Critical Election Period	
<u>Dependent Variables</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Std. Dev.</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Std. Dev.</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Std. Dev.</u>
Turnout	43.89	26.79	51.06	26.95	54.75	28.80
Total Votes	2,242	2,288	2,566	2,338	2,634	2,318
Democratic Vote Share	65.42	22.05	62.82	20.23	61.32	17.45
Republican Vote Share	21.17	23.16	15.63	20.93	18.46	21.39
Populist Vote Share	9.39	16.96	6.08	15.09	7.95	15.78
<u>Independent Variables</u>						
Corrupt + Negro Vote	3.35	13.19	5.15	20.75	9.60	31.47
Perc. Black Population	0.37	0.23	0.42	0.23	0.40	0.22
Population Growth	0.02	0.03	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.02
Perc. Urban Population	0.13	0.21	0.10	0.19	0.12	0.21
Log Real Farm Values	12.54	1.11	12.20	0.61	12.21	0.67
Log Real Manufacturing Wages	6.34	1.84	6.29	1.35	6.35	1.39
Presidential Election Year Dummy	0.51	0.49	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.50
Counties	347		226		110	
Observations	9,497		454		278	

**Note:** Summary statistics included for counties where a newspaper was published and is recorded in the *Newspapers.com* archive during the period.

**Source:** Author's calculations using data described in this section.

Table 5: Estimates of newspaper references to corruption and Black voters on election outcomes, first critical election period

	Dependent Variables				
	Total Voters	Voter Turnout	Democratic Vote Share	Republican Vote Share	Populist Vote Share
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Corrupt + Negro Vote ( $\beta$ )	0.004*** (0.001)	0.004*** (0.001)	-0.000 (0.001)	0.017** (0.008)	0.095** (0.046)
Demographic Controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Economic Controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
State and Year Fixed Effects	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Standardized $\beta$	0.091	0.094	-0.002	0.1188	0.3736
$R^2$	0.3314	0.3533	0.1255	0.3627	0.4309

**Note:** Robust standard errors in parentheses, \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.1$ . The “Standardized  $\beta$ ” shows the coefficient for “Corrupt + Negro Vote” when both the dependent and independent variables have been standardized to have a mean value of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. All models are estimated in first differences. Period includes first critical election years as defined by Table 2. Demographic controls include percent of the Black population, percent of the Black population squared, population growth, and percent of the population living in an urban area. Economic controls include farm values and manufacturing wages. All regressions included fixed effects for state and year and an indicator for a presidential election year. Nominal manufacturing wages were deflated using an index for costs of unskilled labor. Nominal farm values were deflated using a consumer price index. Number of counties and observations is in Table 4.

**Source:** Author’s calculation.

Table 6: Estimates of newspaper references to corruption and Black voters on election outcomes, second critical election period

	Dependent Variables				
	Total Voters	Voter Turnout	Democratic Vote Share	Republican Vote Share	Populist Vote Share
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Corrupt + Negro Vote ( $\beta$ )	0.004*** (0.009)	0.004*** (0.001)	-0.001* (0.000)	0.004 (0.003)	0.044* (0.025)
Demographic Controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Economic Controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
State and Year Fixed Effects	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Standardized $\beta$	0.118	0.123	-0.045	0.051	0.1382
$R^2$	0.4076	0.4402	0.2148	0.7399	0.5123

**Note:** Robust standard errors in parentheses, \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.1$ . The “Standardized  $\beta$ ” shows the coefficient for “Corrupt + Negro Vote” when both the dependent and independent variables have been standardized to have a mean value of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. All models are estimated in first differences. Period includes first critical election years as defined by Table 2. Demographic controls include percent of the Black population, percent of the Black population squared, population growth, and percent of the population living in an urban area. Economic controls include farm values and manufacturing wages. All regressions included fixed effects for state and year and an indicator for a presidential election year. Nominal manufacturing wages were deflated using an index for costs of unskilled labor. Nominal farm values were deflated using a consumer price index. Number of counties and observations is in Table 4.

**Source:** Author’s calculation.



Table 7: Standardized coefficients of newspaper references to corruption and Black voters on election outcomes, first and second critical election periods

Independent Variables: Indicator for "Corrupt + Negro Vote" references above specified percentiles	Dependent Variables				
	Total Voters (1)	Voter Turnout (2)	Democratic Vote Share (3)	Republican Vote Share (4)	Populist Vote Share (5)
Panel A: First Critical Election Period					
75 <sup>th</sup> Percentile	0.076	0.076	-0.009	0.085	0.870**
90 <sup>th</sup> Percentile	0.145	0.139	-0.160	-0.313	0.232
95 <sup>th</sup> Percentile	0.313**	0.333**	-0.038	0.435	1.488**
99 <sup>th</sup> Percentile	0.430**	0.440**	0.146	-	-
Panel B: Second Critical Election Period					
75 <sup>th</sup> Percentile	0.109	0.118	-0.186	0.119	0.275
90 <sup>th</sup> Percentile	0.276***	0.265***	-0.170	-0.301	0.115
95 <sup>th</sup> Percentile	0.350***	0.371***	-0.278*	-0.099	0.580***
99 <sup>th</sup> Percentile	0.599*	0.672**	-0.214*	0.287	-0.520

**Notes:** \*\*\*p < 0.01, \*\*p < 0.05, \*p < 0.1. All models are estimated in first differences. Only the dependent and variable has been standardized to have a mean value of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. All models include demographic and economic controls as well as fixed effects for state and year as well as an indicator for presidential election years. Demographic controls include percent of the Black population, percent of the Black population squared, population growth, and percent of the population living in an urban area. Economic controls include farm values and manufacturing wages.

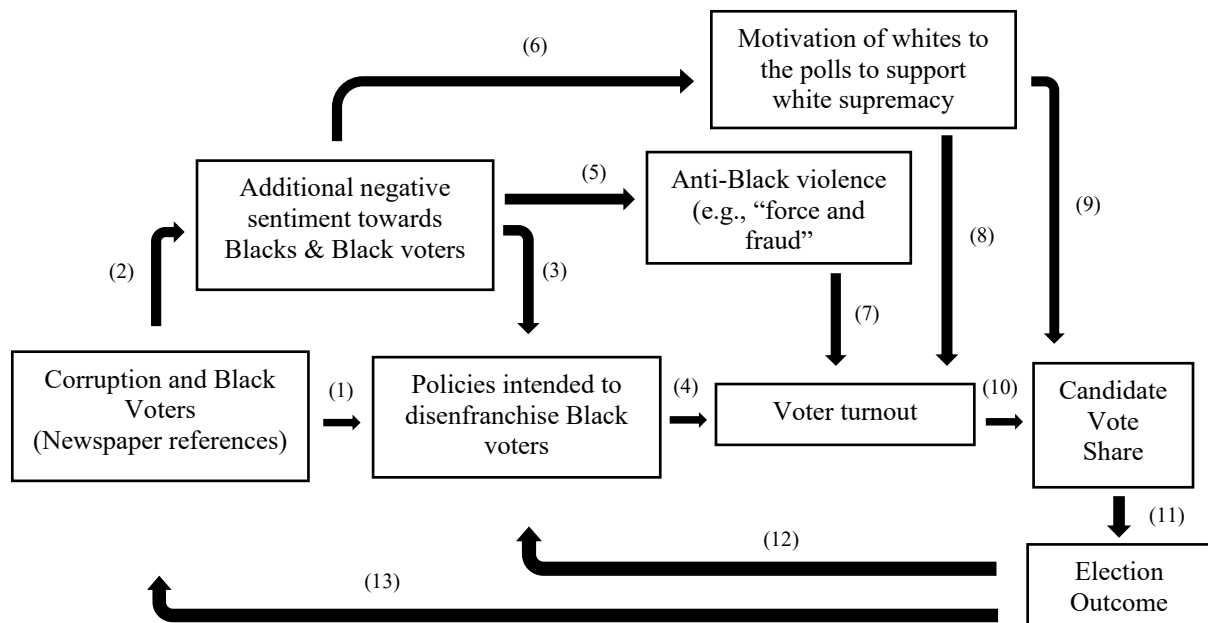
**Sources:** Author's calculations.

Table 8: Direct and indirect effects of newspaper references to corruption and Black voters on voter turnout

Independent Variable: Corrupt + Negro Vote	Dependent Variable: Voter Turnout	
	Panel A	Panel B
Direct effect (same county)	0.002** (0.001)	0.002** (0.001)
Indirect effect (other counties)	0.003* (0.002)	-0.001 (0.002)
Number of counties	340	245

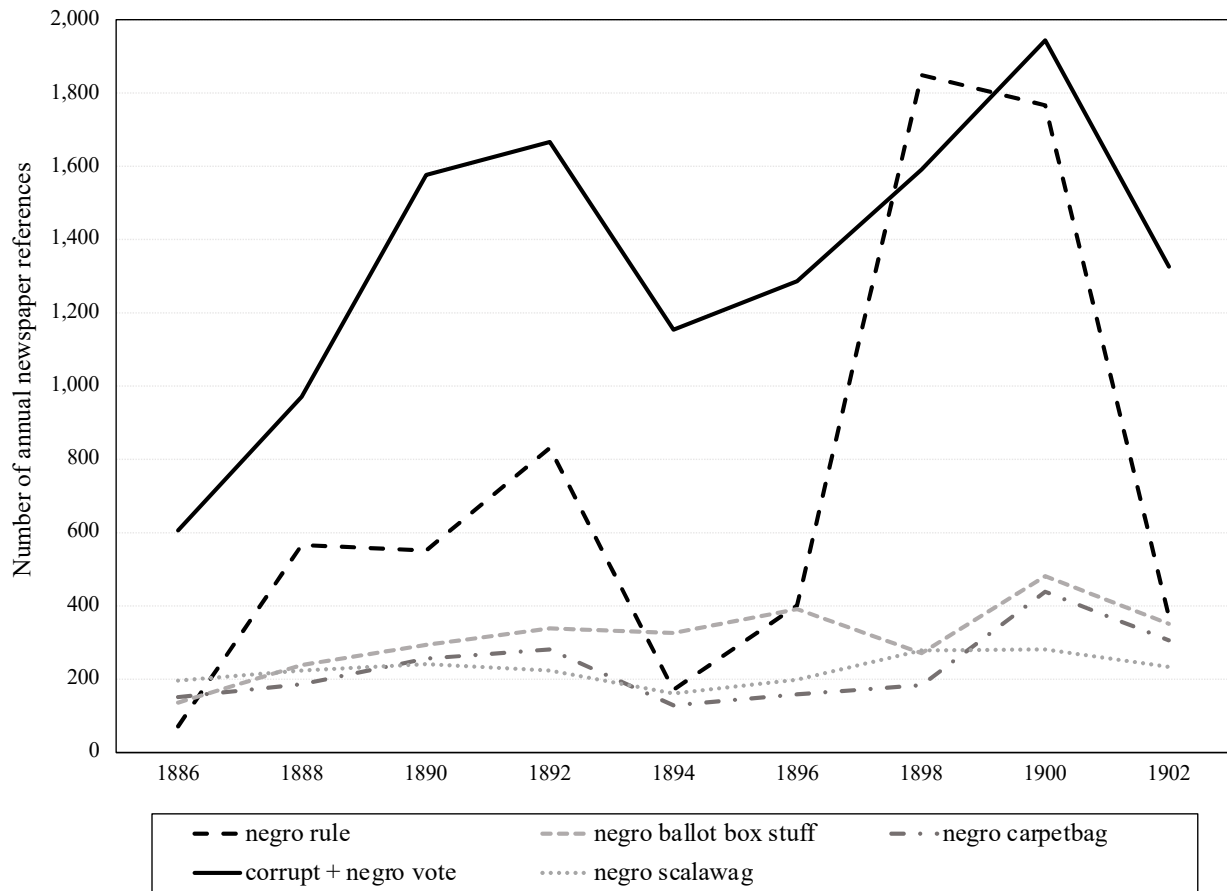
**Note:** Standard errors calculated using delta method in parentheses. \*\*\*p < 0.01, \*\*p < 0.05, \*p < 0.1. All regressions included fixed effects for state and year as well as all controls reflected include in Tables 7-9. The sample includes counties that were not represented in the *Newspaper.com* newspaper archive so as to measure the effects on contiguous counties to those where a newspaper was published.

Figure 1: Relationship between corruption in newspapers, voter turnout, and vote share



*Source:* Author.

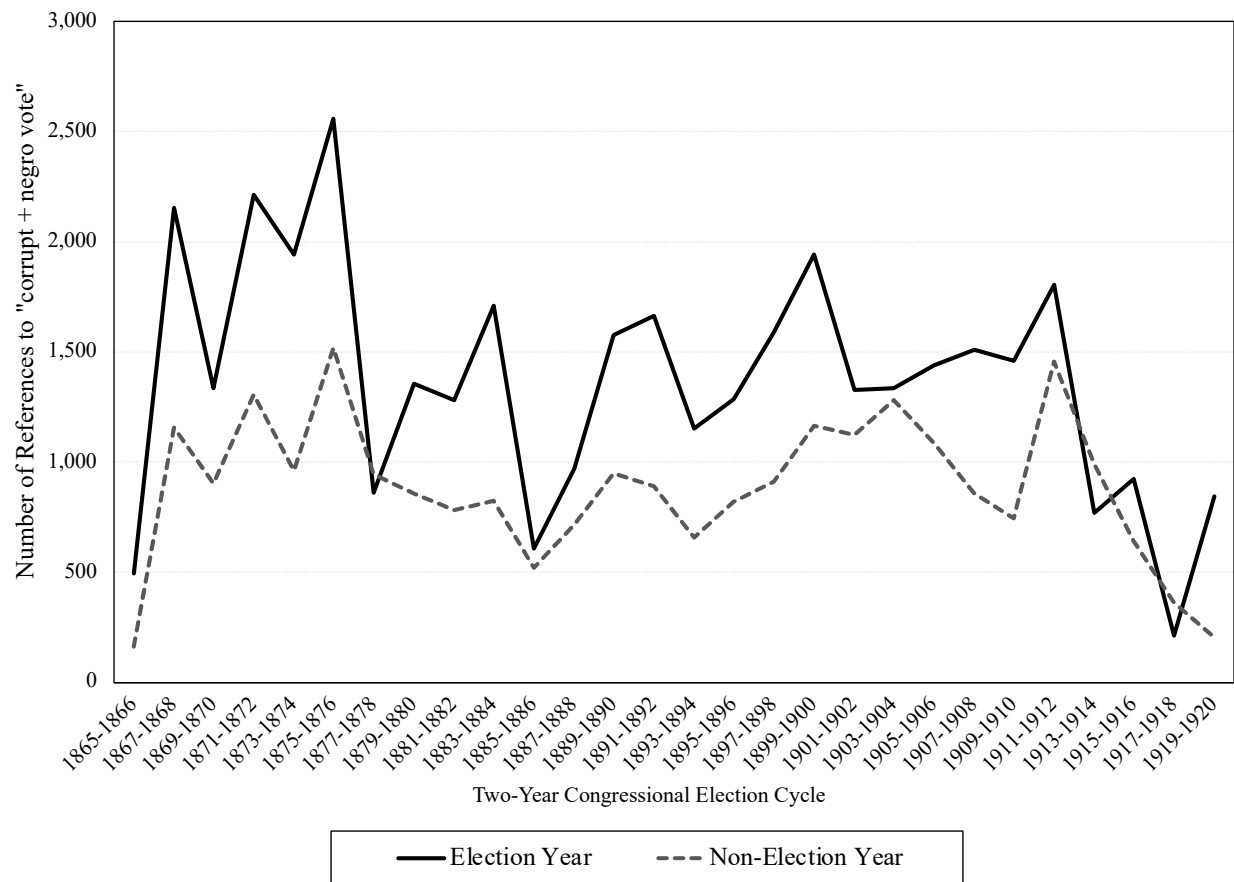
Figure 2: Southern newspaper references for different search terms for corruption and Black voting



**Note:** Data is for election years only (non-election years excluded) for the period from 1886 to 1902. Data also includes only searches relating to newspapers published in Southern states. Between 1886 and 1902, there were 12,118 references to “corrupt + negro vote” in Southern papers during election years, 6,576 references to “negro rule,” 2,828 references to “negro ballot box stuff,” 2,091 references to “negro carpetbag,” and 2,036 references to “negro scalawag.”

**Source:** Author’s calculations using data from *Newspapers.com*.

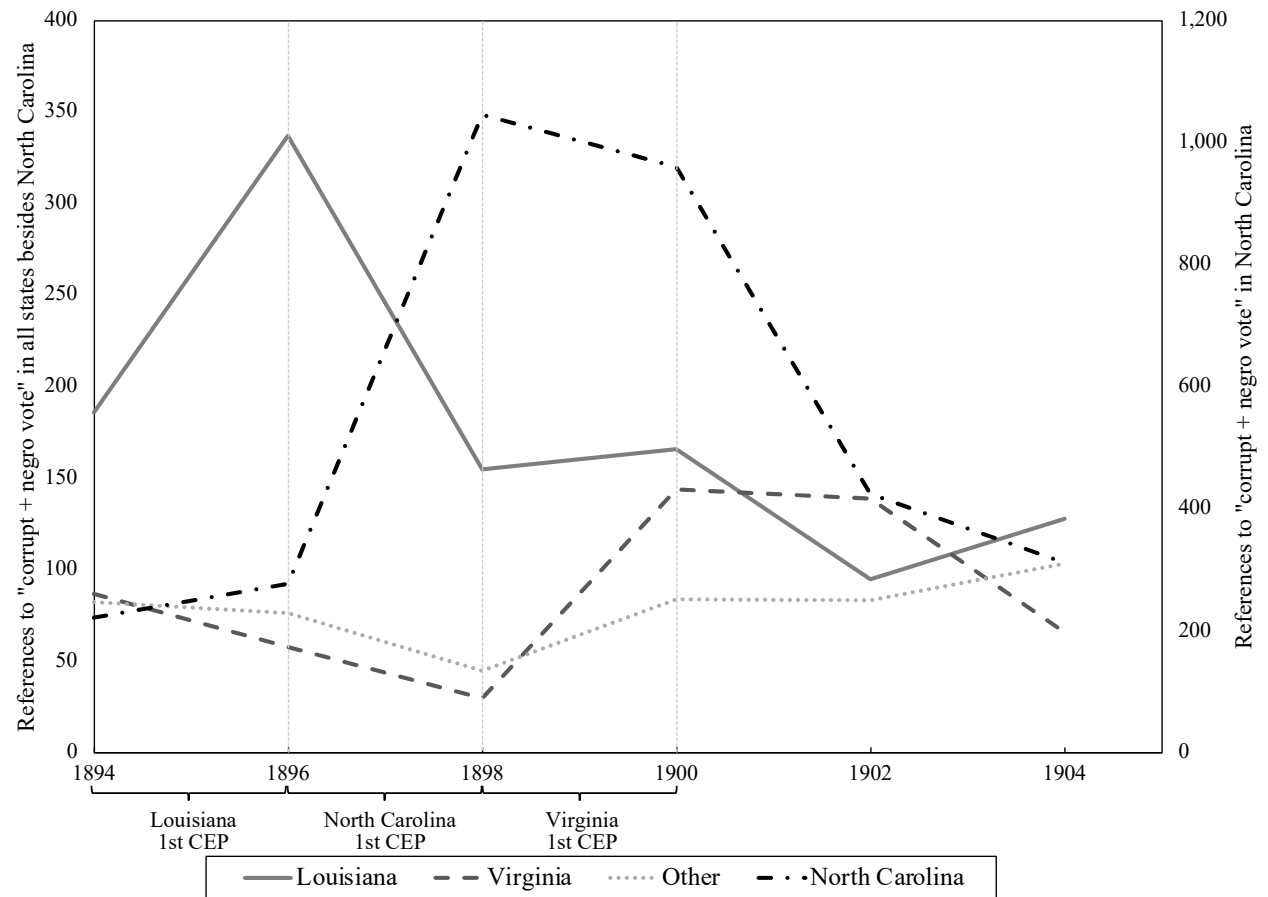
Figure 3: Number of references to “corrupt + negro vote” in election and non-election years within the same election cycle



**Note:** The solid line represents the number of references of “corrupt + negro vote” during election years within an election cycle whereas the dashed line represents the number of references during the non-election year within the election cycle. Therefore, there are two points for every observation along the horizontal axis which represents the two-year congressional election cycle.

**Source:** Author’s calculations using data from *Newspapers.com*.

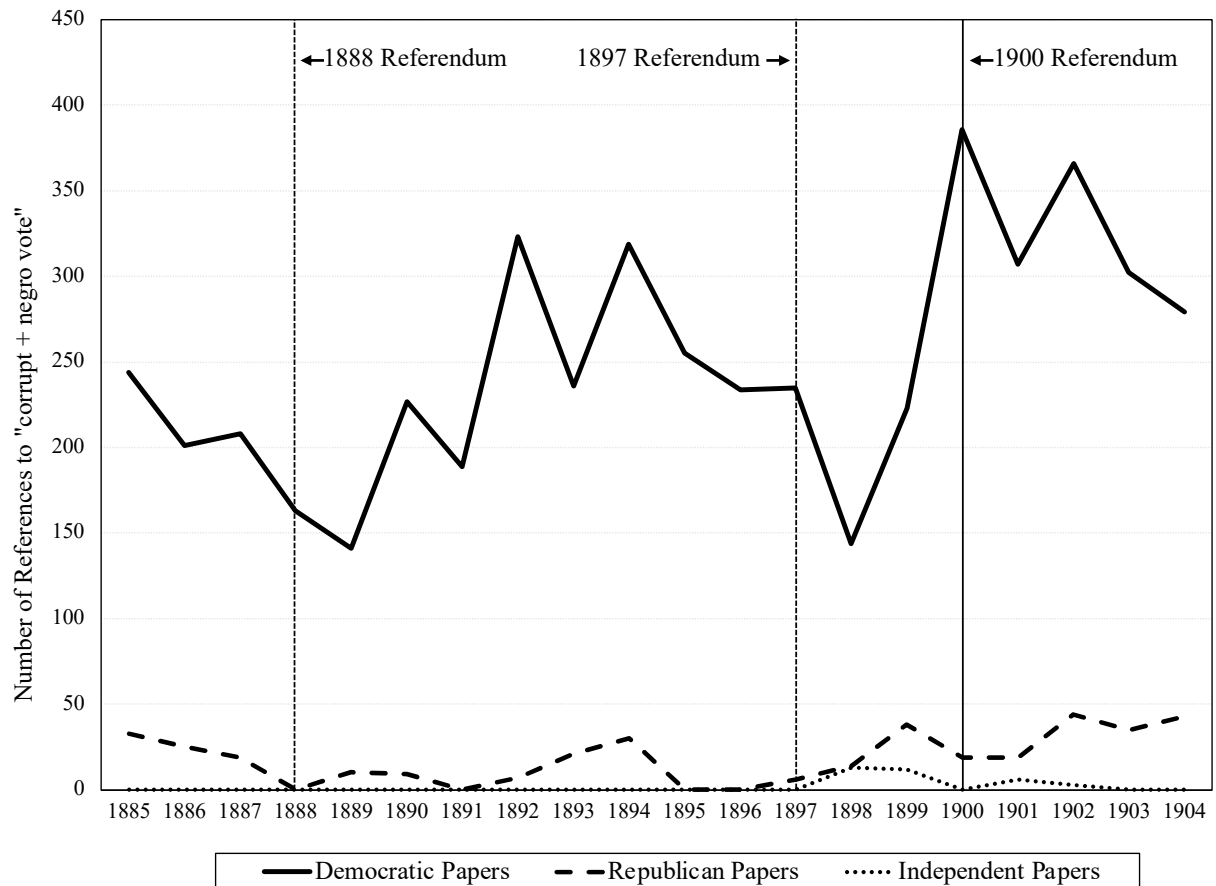
Figure 4: Trends in corruption and Black voting during critical election periods



**Notes:** The first critical election periods for Louisiana, North Carolina, and Virginia are denoted by “1st CEP.”

**Source:** Author’s calculations using data from *Newspapers.com*.

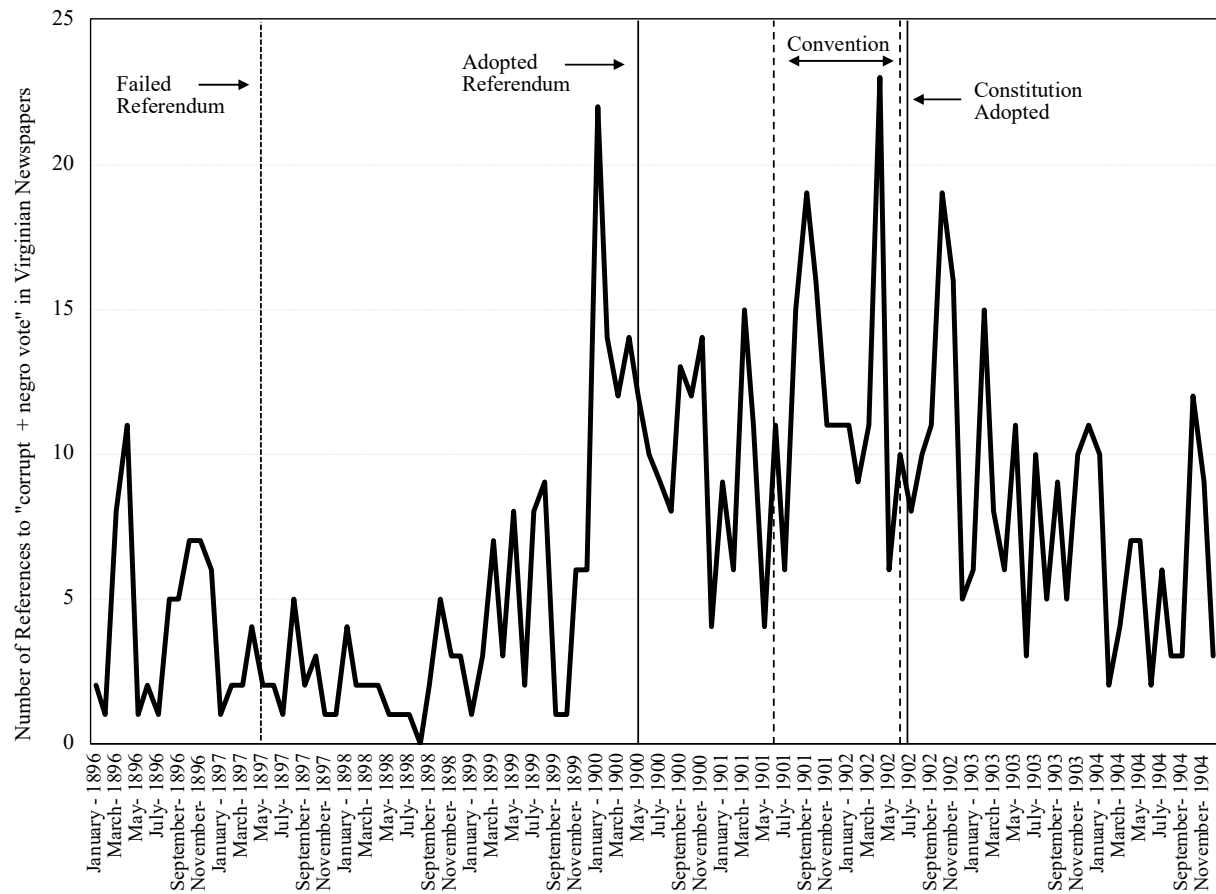
Figure 5: Number of references to “corrupt + negro vote” in Virginian newspapers by party affiliation, 1885-1904



**Note:** Newspaper affiliations were determined using four sources: (1) the Library of Congress’s *Chronicling America* project; (2) the Library of Virginia’s *Virginia Chronicle* project; (3) the editor of the paper was associated with the Democratic Party; and (4) *N.W. Ayer and Son’s American Newspaper Annual*. The vertical lines represent years when a referendum on a constitutional convention received a vote. The dashed lines represent when the referendum failed whereas the solid line represents when the referendum passed.

**Source:** Author’s calculations using data from *Newspapers.com*.

Figure 6: Number of references to “corrupt + negro vote” in Virginian newspapers

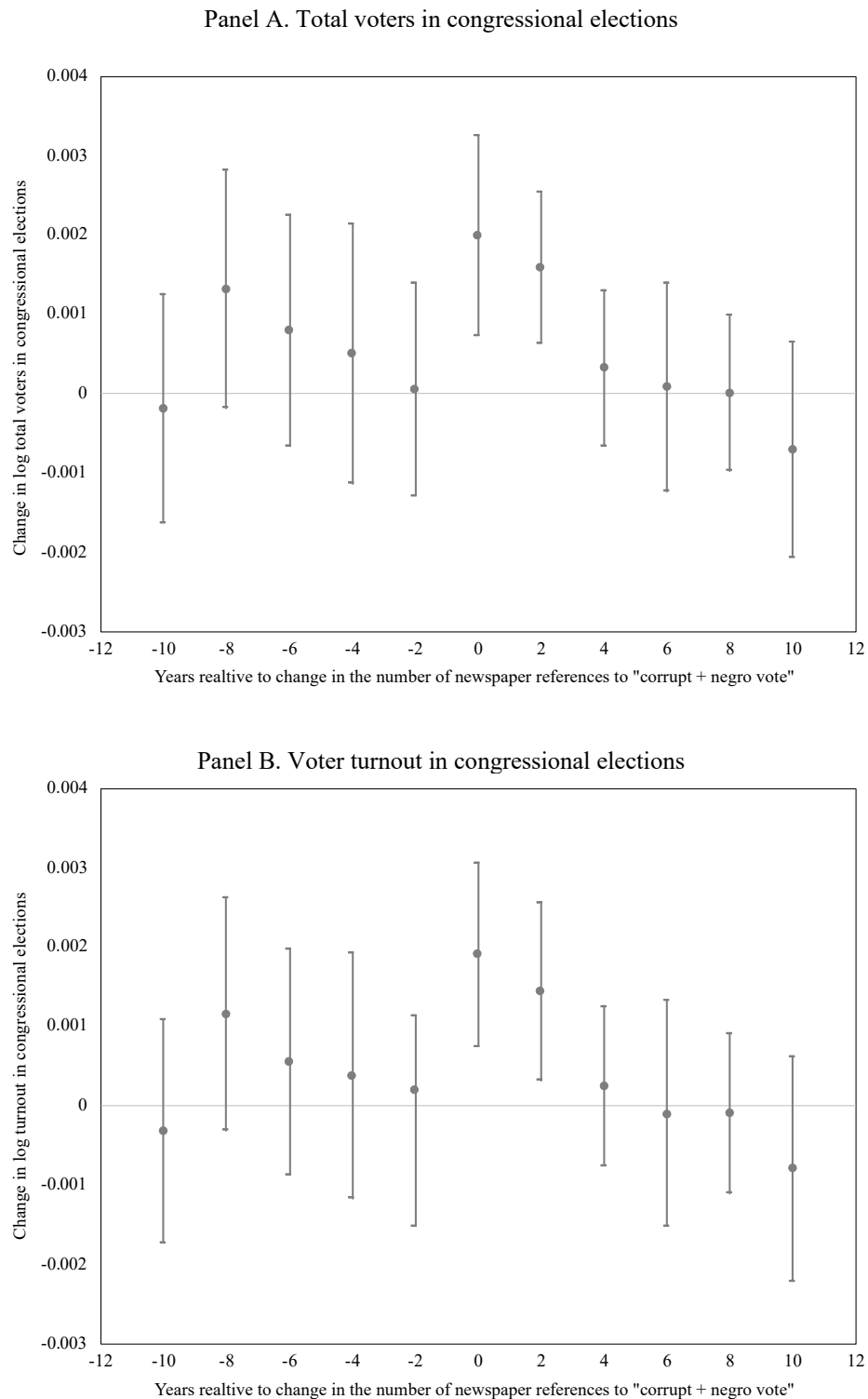


**Note:** Dates on referendums and convention are denoted by vertical lines while the source is Long (1901).

**Source:** Author’s calculations using data from *Newspapers.com*.



Figure 7: Changes in electoral outcomes around newspaper references to corruption and Black voters



**Note:** Figure 8 plots the coefficients from regression (3) over the period from 1870 until 1920. The dependent variable for Panel A is the natural log of the total number of voters in a congressional election. The dependent variable for Panel B is the natural log of voter turnout in congressional elections. Year fixed effects are included. Robust standard errors are clustered by county. **Source:** Author's calculations.

## Data Appendix

### A. *Corruption in Newspapers*

*Corruption:* References to “corrupt + negro vote” are from *Newspapers.com*. *Newspapers.com* uses Optical Character Recognition (OCR) to index words included within newspapers pages. This allows for the search of both the number of pages and the number of references within a page. It is possible that the OCR processing may misidentify words which required the author to check each page for correct assignment. However, it is also possible that the OCR altogether missed words that should have been assigned to the search.

Newspapers.com regularly adds new newspapers and newspaper pages to their database. The figures in this paper uses searches that were conducted in June and July 2020. The numbers have not changed between July and October 2020.

### B. *Data on County Characteristics*

*Percent Black Population:* Constructed using Black and total population from the county level Census data from Haines and Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Science Research (2010) downloaded from Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Science Research (ICSPR). Specially, see parts 9, 11, 15, 18, 20, 22, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29, 32, and 33 of ICSPR Study No. 2896.

*Population Growth:* Constructed using total population from the county level Census data from Haines and ICSPR (2010) downloaded from ICSPR.

*Manufacturing Wages (Real):* Constructed using manufacturing wages from the county level Census data from Haines and ICPSR (2010) downloaded from ICSPR. Nominal manufacturing wages were deflated using an index for the costs of unskilled labor.

*Farm Values (Real):* Constructed using farm values from the county level Census data from Haines and ICPSR (2010) downloaded from ICSPR. Nominal farm values were deflated using a consumer price index.

*Percent of Urban Population:* Constructed using the urban population and total population from the county level Census data from Haines and ICPSR (2010) downloaded from ICSPR.

### C. *Data on Elections*

*Turnout and total voters:* Turnout and total voters are from Clubb et al. (2006) downloaded from ICSPR.

*Vote Share:* The share of is from Clubb et al. (2006) downloaded from ICSPR.

## Appendix Tables and Figures

Table A1: Support for the 1897 referendum on the constitutional convention in Virginia

Race	Vote on the Referendum on Calling for Constitutional Convention		
	Supportive	Against	Not Voting
White	8%	35%	57%
Black	12%	0%	89%

*Note:* Rows may not add to 100% due to rounding.

*Source:* Kousser (1974), table 6.10.

Table A2: Voting statistics for referendums on constitutional conventions in Virginia

Referendum Year	Voters who Voted	Eligible Voters who Voted
	Supportive	Supportive
1888	8%	1%
1897	33%	9%
1900	53%	29%

*Note:* Eligible voters who voted supportive is derived from an estimate of total eligible voters (including those who did not vote) in that election year.

*Source:* Author's calculations using data on constitutional convention referendums from Long (1901) and eligible voters from Clubb et al. (2006).

Table A3: Support for the 1897 and 1900 referendums on the constitutional convention in Virginia by county demographics

Referendum Year	Black Majority		White Majority	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
1897	40%	46%	29%	28%
1900	51%	52%	49%	62%
Change between 1897 and 1900	+11%	+6%	+20%	+34%

*Note:* Rural is defined as a jurisdiction with less than 25 percent of the population living in an urban area.

*Source:* Author's calculations using data from Long (1901).

Table A4: Examples of references to corruption and Black voting in Southern newspapers

	Before State Constitution	After State Constitution
<b>Alabama</b> Constitution (1901) Poll Tax (1903) Literacy Test (1901) Grandfather Clause (1901) White Primary (1902)	... carpet baggers and <b>corrupt politicians have made a tool of the negro vote</b> to elect ambitious and unscrupulous office seekers and to block legislation favorable to the South... outraged to the core by <b>ignorant and corrupt negro domination</b> , “took the bull by the horns’ and held him so he couldn’t gore, <b>and now they want to forge a constitutional amendment chain for him that will keep him in his place.</b> (Cullman, 1900) (a)	It is interesting to note that in such states as Pennsylvania the negro vote should be manipulated by unscrupulous politicians to be used against those who take stands in the interests of the public peace and better government. <b>In the South happily the vicious and illiterate negro vote is legally gotten rid of and the state governments of the South are comparatively free from corruption and encounter no danger from that source.</b> (Birmingham, 1906) (b)
<b>Arkansas</b> Constitution (1908) Poll Tax (1893-1905; 1909) Literacy Test (N/A) Grandfather Clause (N/A) White Primary (1906)	... in some of the southern states where a polltax [sic] law exists, <b>large numbers of polltax receipts are purchased by party managers and others interested.... The activity of what there is left of the Republican machine in this county to corral the negro vote...</b> calls attention to the gravity of omission of a plank in the state Democratic platform to regulate the payment of poll taxes. <b>This is a species of bribery and corruption...</b> (Little Rock, 1904) (c)	[Speaking on a resolution in the state House to adopt a carbon ballot system to reduce fraud], Mr. Collins of Drew was against the proposition. “Under the present laws we can control the negro vote, and since we’ve got to control the negro, I say let the law alone as it stands. <b>I believe in honest elections, but so far as having negroes run for office, I want to say that if a negro undertakes to run for office in our section, we won’t count him out. We’ll hang him up.</b> ” (Little Rock, 1909) (d)
<b>Florida</b> Constitution (1887) Poll Tax (1885) Literacy Test (N/A) Grandfather Clause (N/A) White Primary (1902)	It is a fact that <b>the negro vote can be used by unscrupulous leaders for pure, selfish purposes.</b> The purpose is to strengthen the Republican party in the south, <b>the means that use of Federal patronage in aid of any independent movement that may be started.</b> It is now proposed that in Georgia or South Carolina or wherever an independent leader shows any strength among the negroes. (Pensacola, 1882) (e)	Now as white men and true Democrats <b>let us see that this negro vote does not dominate in the present city campaign and let us purify the ballot of this densely ignorant and corrupt vote by voting a straight white Democratic ticket....</b> We all know what the conditions of affairs were there during the negro domination, therefore let us see that it does not dominate the city of Pensacola to the danger of property and person. (Pensacola, 1905) (f)
<b>Georgia</b> Constitution (1908) Poll Tax (1877) Literacy Test (1908) Grandfather Clause (1908) White Primary (1908)	Candidate [for Governor, Clark] Howell knows and so do all the ring crowd that are backing him know <b>the negro’s vote is wanted for no other purpose than to corrupt the ballot box. They don’t want “Cuffie’s” vote annulled, as they may need it to keep in office or to sustain railroad domination, or to keep open liquor shops in Georgia.</b> (Atlanta, 1906) (g)	The gubernatorial election of 1868 developed a spirited contest between the radicals and the reorganized democratic party [sic].... <b>The radical candidate, Bullock, was elected, and the constitution adopted, but, unfortunately for the radical purposes, he failed to control the new legislature, and hence, the Bullock regime, thought corrupt, did not subject Georgia to anything like the saturnalia of legislative and administrative crime that afflicted other southern states.</b> (Atlanta, 1915) (h)
<b>Louisiana</b> Constitution (1898) Poll Tax (1898) Literacy Test (1898) Grandfather Clause (1898) White Primary (N/A)	That Louisiana is sadly in need of a new constitution, a constitution that will simplify and improve our organic law and do away with the mass of intricacies and inconsistencies with which our statute books are laden – <b>a constitution that will regulate the</b>	It was made a cardinal principal of the Democratic party [sic] that we must <b>purge that party of the venal and corrupt negro vote in order that white supremacy might be the rule in this land....</b> (New Orleans, 1899) (j)

	<i>perplexing suffrage question and eliminate the horde of ignorant and corrupt negro votes, that breeder of strife and blood-shed, from our politics....</i> (Opelousas, 1897) (i)	
<b>Mississippi</b> Constitution (1890) Poll Tax (1890) Literacy Test (1890) Grandfather Clause (1890) White Primary (1902)	<i>It declared that, having seen one of their number hellishly murdered by a negro bully set on by a negro policeman, of a negro-cursed city, that corrupt Radical negro government should and must be wiped out, at any cost, that if negroes ran for office they should do so at their own peril; and it warned all negroes “against attempting to foist upon us this black and damnable machinery called a government.”</i> (Jackson, 1888) (k)	<i>Years ago, in urging the policy of a Constitutional Convention, we took occasion to say that a solid white vote in the South was a thing to be deplored, that there was indeed just one thing worse. And that was a divided white vote – that so long as the Negro was a political factor, white solidarity was the only alternative to corrupt practices at elections, to misrule and disorder.</i> (Vicksburg, 1896) (l)
<b>North Carolina</b> Constitution (1900) Poll Tax (1900-1920) Literacy Test (1900) Grandfather Clause (1900) White Primary (N/A)	<i>The time is near at hand when the Mississippi or Louisiana plan, or “something equally as good” will be adopted in every Southern State. It is necessary in order to preserve the peace of society, of property, and to escape the rule of ignorance and corruption. The negro vote eliminated, the man who aspires to high honors in public life will be compelled to appeal to virtue and intelligence of the people, not venality and ignorance.</i> (Statesville, 1899) (m)	<i>Eradicate all apprehension of negro domination, and the good will between the races will begin to increase, and the determination on the part of white taxpayers, will become fixed, and the negroes will soon have better schools, better educational advantages.... No country can be safe with a vicious, ignorant electorate and a corrupt ballot.... No white man with a white man’s heart and principles can afford to vote for negro suffrage, negro rule, negro superintendency of public schools, negro magistrates for white people.</i> (Wilmington, 1900) (n)
<b>South Carolina</b> Constitution (1895) Poll Tax (1895) Literacy Test (1895) Grandfather Clause (1895) White Primary (1896)	<i>It is unfortunate indeed that the foundation of our social and political institutions is the unity of the white people. This condition was thrust upon us by the emancipation and enfranchisement, with one stroke, of an unfortunate, ignorant race, unfit to govern themselves. Placed in power by the bayonet, forced to govern their former masters, we thus witnessed a spectacle seldom recorded in history, a government of ignorance, vice and corruption, over wisdom, virtue and honesty.</i> (Manning, 1894) (o)	<i>Some of our office seekers are doing the same thing on a small scale – yes, buying negro votes. The white primary didnt [sic] nominate them, and they have renigged and reniggered. A little whiskey and a few dollars will secure the darkies, and the fear is that the white primaries will prove a failure.... The negro who sells his vote is not half as depraved as the white who buys it.</i> (Manning, 1900) (p)
<b>Tennessee</b> Constitution (N/A) Poll Tax (1889) Literacy Test (N/A) Grandfather Clause (N/A) White Primary (N/A)	<i>There are counties in Tennessee where party lines are not drawn in local elections in which no man dare aspire to a lucrative office if he hasn’t money to buy the negro vote.... The negro would never have an opinion on any political or economic-question nor any preference for one party over another. He would simply be a corrupt and corrupting element which would degrade politics and make our political elections a stench which would be smelled to the end of the world.</i> (Nashville, 1889) (q)	<i>The Republican party gained a temporary and dishonorable advantage by it during reconstruction days, but since then the negro vote has been of no special advantage to that party. The negro vote is still corrupt and ignorant, for the most part, and with little sign of improvement, however much the negro has advanced or may advance in other directions. It is a constant cause and source of corrupt practices and dishonest methods in politics on the part of both parties, and will continue to be so long as the negro has the unrestricted privilege of suffrage.</i> (Knoxville, 1895) (r)

<b>Texas</b> Constitution (1902) Poll Tax (1902) Literacy Test (1902) Grandfather Clause (N/A) White Primary (1905)	<i><b>Our white race is greatly to blame for corrupt practices in dealing with the negro's vote. Reckless and bad men too long trafficked with money for that vote, and now they are corruption the poor white vote. The time has come (if it ever will come) to appeal to the negro's reason and to make him choose between voting a clean ballot and being clothed with a striped jacket in the penitentiary if he sells his vote. We must either make him vote an unbought ballot or deport him or slay him, for free government can not last with a depraved ballot.</b></i> (Austin, 1902) (s)	<i><b>Some of us can remember the period of reconstruction, when ignorant African slaves were enfranchised and force on our people as voters. During the Davis administration, white men were compelled to approach the ballot box between rows of armed negro police and then compelled to go directly home after voting, the negro vote was a menace to our civilization, for it was controlled absolutely by corrupt and imported political adventurers.</b></i> (Fort Worth, 1907) (t)
<b>Virginia</b> Constitution (1902) Poll Tax (1876-1882; 1904) Literacy Test (1902) Grandfather Clause (1902) White Primary (N/A)	<i><b>The election to be held in August is one of the most important since the [Civil War]. The ratification of the Constitutional Amendment and the elimination of the ignorant and corrupt negro vote is of first importance.</b></i> (Norfolk, 1900) (u)	<i><b>We may have had corrupt politicians in Virginia and they have been more or less in authority. But they were the direct outgrowth of the fifteenth amendment, which put the ballot into the hands of the negro.... But thanks to the honesty and decency of the Virginia people, they have determined to remove the cause and the very pretext for such practices. Henceforth the negro will not be a factor in our politics and there will be no occasion for fraudulent practices.</b></i> (Richmond, 1902) (v)

**Note:** Most Southern states adopted new constitutions during the post-Reconstruction period with the intention of supporting the disenfranchisement of Black voters. However, Tennessee did not adopt new a constitution during the period and, therefore, I use periods before and after the poll tax was applied for federal elections. Years when the poll tax was initially applied during the period are in parentheses. If there was a break in the application for the poll tax during the period of study (1865-1932), I've included the entire period and, if applicable, the year for when the poll tax was adopted for a second time in the case of Arkansas and Virginia. Emphasis added by Author to the original and the place and year of publication is in the parentheses. Full citations are below.

**Sources:** (a) *The Tribune-Gazette* (Cullman, Alabama) 4 August 1900; (b) *The Birmingham News* (Birmingham, Alabama) 17 November 1906; (c) *Arkansas Democrat* (Little Rock, Arkansas) 28 July 1904; (d) *Arkansas Democrat* (Little Rock, Arkansas) 15 February 1909; (e) *Pensacola Commercial* (Pensacola, Florida) 25 August 1882; (f) *Pensacola News Journal* (Pensacola, Florida) 3 June 1905; (g) *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, Georgia) 15 March 1906; (h) *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, Georgia) 17 July 1915; (i) *St. Landry Clarion* (Opelousas, Louisiana) 3 July 1897; (j) *The Time-Democrat* (New Orleans, Louisiana) 5 November 1899; (k) *Mississippian* (Jackson, Mississippi) 17 January 1888; (l) *The Daily Commercial Herald* (Vicksburg, Mississippi) 9 February 1896; (m) *Carolina Mascot* (Statesville, North Carolina), 23 November 1899; (n) *The Semi-Weekly Messenger* (Wilmington, North Carolina) 8 June 1900; (o) *The Manning Times* (Manning, South Carolina) 12 December 1894; (p) *The Manning Times* (Manning, South Carolina) 19 September 1900; (q) *The Daily American* (Nashville, Tennessee) 15 April 1889; (r) *The Knoxville Tribute* (Knoxville, Tennessee) 1 November 1895; (s) *Austin American-Stateman* (Austin, Texas) 22 August 1902; (t) *Forth Worth Telegram* (Fort Worth, Texas) 1 June 1907; (u) *Virginian-Pilot* (Norfolk, Virginia) 27 February 1900; (v) *The Times* (Richmond, Virginia) 9 September 1902. The years of adoption of the reforms intended to disenfranchise Blacks is based on author's assessment of information from the NBER and University of Maryland State Constitutions project, from Keyssar (2000) and Escott and Goldfield (1990).

Table A5: Estimates of newspaper references to corruption and Black voters on election outcomes, 1870-1920

	Dependent Variables				
	Total Voters	Voter Turnout	Democratic Vote Share	Republican Vote Share	Populist Vote Share
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Corrupt + Negro Vote	0.0013* (0.0007)	0.0013* (0.0007)	-0.0002 (0.0005)	-0.0076** (0.0037)	-0.0081 (0.0066)
Percent Black Population	0.7513 (1.3108)	-0.7528 (1.0161)	-0.1888 (1.7400)	6.9192 (10.7584)	10.8925 (17.2596)
Percent Black Population ^ 2	-0.8676 (1.2970)	0.5697 (1.1765)	-0.0047 (1.7559)	-0.5072 (9.1730)	-7.0669 (18.6489)
Population Growth	-0.4676 (0.3480)	-0.8255** (0.3479)	0.3341 (0.3163)	4.1605* (2.445)	4.6387 (7.0134)
Percent Urban Population	-0.0778 (0.1972)	0.0687 (0.1496)	0.0821 (0.1651)	0.6805 (0.4393)	2.123** (1.0065)
Log (Real) Farm Values	0.1339** (0.0579)	-0.0061 (0.0375)	0.3438 (0.2533)	-0.5552 (0.3441)	1.3832* (0.8142)
Log (Real) Manufacturing Wages	0.0328 (0.0201)	-0.0131 (0.0198)	-0.0346 (0.0211)	-0.1093 (0.0813)	0.3034 (0.1995)
Presidential Election (Dummy)	-0.0729 (0.0996)	0.8270*** (0.0632)	-0.0096 (0.1212)	-0.2608 (0.1594)	-0.7197 (0.6007)
$R^2$	0.4610	0.4247	0.0820	0.0834	0.3043

**Note:** Robust standard errors in parentheses, \*\*\*p < 0.01, \*\*p < 0.05, \*p < 0.1. All models are estimated in first differences. Period includes every other year from 1870 until 1920 to align with congressional elections. All regressions included fixed effects for state and year. Nominal manufacturing wages were deflated using an index for costs of unskilled labor. Nominal farm values were deflated using a consumer price index. Number of counties and observations is in Table 4.

**Source:** Author's calculation.

Table A6: Estimates of newspaper references to corruption and Black voters on election outcomes, first critical election period

	Dependent Variables				
	Total Voters	Voter Turnout	Democratic Vote Share	Republican Vote Share	Populist Vote Share
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Corrupt + Negro Vote	0.0036*** (0.0008)	0.0037*** (0.0008)	-0.0004 (0.0005)	0.0170** (0.0078)	0.0951** (0.0461)
Percent Black Population	2.6970 (7.8538)	-0.9850 (7.5363)	-2.8484 (4.0278)	46.3907 (48.7444)	79.1824 (52.5423)
Percent Black Population ^ 2	-4.1142 (7.5586)	0.1228 (7.2920)	6.9070* (3.7276)	-1.1156 (45.4776)	-84.0788 (68.2985)
Population Growth	2.2269 (1.4309)	1.1881 (1.4532)	1.9916 (1.4910)	7.9028 (39.0661)	271.2716 (207.3194)
Percent Urban Population	1.7371 (1.0698)	2.2944** (1.0334)	0.8214* (0.4593)	3.5068 (5.9922)	-20.5240 (13.1485)
Log (Real) Farm Values	-0.6925** (0.3391)	-0.8858*** (0.3313)	-0.0829 (0.1865)	-10.5119*** (2.4351)	-1.4167 (4.3558)
Log (Real) Manufacturing Wages	0.0100 (0.0592)	-0.0589 (0.0575)	0.0254 (0.0266)	0.3153 (0.2872)	2.1808 (2.0573)
Presidential Election (Dummy)	-0.0531 (0.0777)	0.0694 (0.0775)	0.0658 (0.0929)	2.3582*** (0.5209)	0.4949 (0.4034)
$R^2$	0.3314	0.3533	0.1255	0.3627	0.4309

**Note:** Robust standard errors in parentheses, \*\*\*p < 0.01, \*\*p < 0.05, \*p < 0.1. All models are estimated in first differences. Period includes first critical election years as defined by Table 2. All regressions included fixed effects for state and year. Nominal manufacturing wages were deflated using an index for costs of unskilled labor. Nominal farm values were deflated using a consumer price index. Number of counties and observations is in Table 4.

**Source:** Author's calculation.



Table A7: Estimates of newspaper references to corruption and Black voters on election outcomes, second critical election period

	Dependent Variables				
	Total Voters	Voter Turnout	Democratic Vote Share	Republican Vote Share	Populist Vote Share
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Corrupt + Negro Vote	0.0041*** (0.009)	0.0044*** (0.0010)	-0.0007* (0.0004)	0.0042 (0.0029)	0.0444* (0.0252)
Percent Black Population	-12.2055 (8.8324)	-14.4010 (9.4467)	2.0608 (5.4877)	11.8090 (25.3602)	-39.6368 (61.2000)
Percent Black Population ^ 2	25.3968** (10.9229)	28.5071** 11.4797	-6.7821 (5.8352)	-12.8890 (22.8756)	22.4787 (67.3071)
Population Growth	-0.5607 (1.5409)	-0.3991 (1.7761)	-0.4835 (0.7962)	0.3105 (3.5150)	-6.1015 (12.4964)
Percent Urban Population	3.5536** (1.7306)	3.9292** (1.8868)	-1.3777* (0.7105)	-3.2882 (2.8327)	13.7819 (10.1619)
Log (Real) Farm Values	-1.9821*** (0.4475)	-2.0574*** (0.4527)	0.2944 (0.2082)	4.5602*** (1.5169)	-1.7180 (2.9933)
Log (Real) Manufacturing Wages	-0.0471 (0.0636)	-0.0762 (0.0651)	-0.0758** (0.037)	-0.1332 (0.1360)	0.3641 (0.3160)
Presidential Election (Dummy)	0.0194 (0.1683)	0.0565 (0.1693)	0.0568 (0.0826)	-1.771*** (0.5442)	0.7389** (0.3044)
$R^2$	0.4076	0.4402	0.2148	0.7399	0.5123

**Note:** Robust standard errors in parentheses, \*\*\*p < 0.01, \*\*p < 0.05, \*p < 0.1. All models are estimated in first differences. Period includes second critical election years as defined by Table 2. Nominal manufacturing wages were deflated using an index for costs of unskilled labor. Nominal farm values were deflated using a consumer price index. Number of counties and observations is in Table 4.

**Source:** Author's calculation.

Table A8: Effects of corruption references on election outcomes, excluding demographic controls

Dependent Variables										
Total Voters			Voter Turnout		Democratic Vote Share		Republican Vote Share		Populist Vote Share	
<u>Panel A: First Critical Election Period</u>										
Corrupt + Negro Vote	0.0036*** (0.0008)	0.0039*** (0.0009)	0.0037*** (0.0008)	0.0040*** (0.0009)	-0.0004 (0.0005)	-0.0003 (0.0004)	0.0170** (0.0078)	0.0156* (0.0090)	0.0951** (0.0461)	0.0996** (0.0449)
Demographic Controls	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
State and Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R <sup>2</sup>	0.3314	0.3272	0.3533	0.3472	0.1255	0.1155	0.3627	0.3245	0.4309	0.2965
<u>Panel B: Second Critical Election Period</u>										
Corrupt + Negro Vote	0.0041*** (0.0009)	0.0042*** (0.0011)	0.0044*** (0.0010)	0.0045*** (0.0012)	-0.0007* (0.0004)	-0.0007 (0.0005)	0.0042 (0.0029)	0.0032 (0.0029)	0.0444* (0.0252)	0.0317 (0.0268)
Demographic Controls	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
State and Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R <sup>2</sup>	0.4076	0.3750	0.4402	0.4848	0.2148	0.1971	0.7399	0.7353	0.5123	0.4860

**Note:** Robust standard errors in parentheses, \*\*\* < 0.01, \*\* < 0.05, \* < 0.1. Economic controls were included in every regression. Demographic controls include percent of the Black population, percent of the Black population squared, population growth, and percent of the population living in an urban area. Economic controls include farm values and manufacturing wages. All regressions included fixed effects for state and year and an indicator for a presidential election year. Nominal manufacturing wages were deflated using an index for costs of unskilled labor. Nominal farm values were deflated using a consumer price index. Number of counties and observations is in Table 4.

**Source:** Author's calculations.

Table A9: Effects of corruption references on election outcomes, excluding economic controls

Dependent Variables										
Total Voters			Voter Turnout		Democratic Vote Share		Republican Vote Share		Populist Vote Share	
Panel A: First Critical Election Period										
Corrupt + Negro Vote	0.0036*** (0.0008)	0.0031*** (0.0009)	0.0037*** (0.0008)	0.0033*** (0.0009)	-0.0004 (0.0005)	-0.0002 (0.0005)	0.0170** (0.0078)	0.0079 (0.0052)	0.0951** (0.0461)	0.0792* (0.0410)
Economic Controls	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
State and Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R <sup>2</sup>	0.3314	0.3258	0.3533	0.3433	0.1255	0.1248	0.3627	0.2122	0.4309	0.3815
Panel B: Second Critical Election Period										
Corrupt + Negro Vote	0.0041*** (0.0009)	0.0045*** (0.0009)	0.0044*** (0.0010)	0.0048*** (0.0010)	-0.0007* (0.0004)	-0.0007 (0.0004)	0.0042 (0.0029)	0.0024 (0.0028)	0.0444* (0.0252)	0.0463* (0.0238)
Demographic Controls	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
State and Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R <sup>2</sup>	0.4076	0.3661	0.4402	0.3963	0.2148	0.2046	0.7399	0.7051	0.5123	0.5058

**Note:** Robust standard errors in parentheses, \*\*\* < 0.01, \*\* < 0.05, \* < 0.1. Demographic controls were included in every regression. Demographic controls include percent of the Black population, percent of the Black population squared, population growth, and percent of the population living in an urban area. Economic controls include farm values and manufacturing wages. All regressions included fixed effects for state and year and an indicator for a presidential election year. Nominal manufacturing wages were deflated using an index for costs of unskilled labor. Nominal farm values were deflated using a consumer price index. Number of counties and observations is in Table 4.

**Source:** Author's calculations.

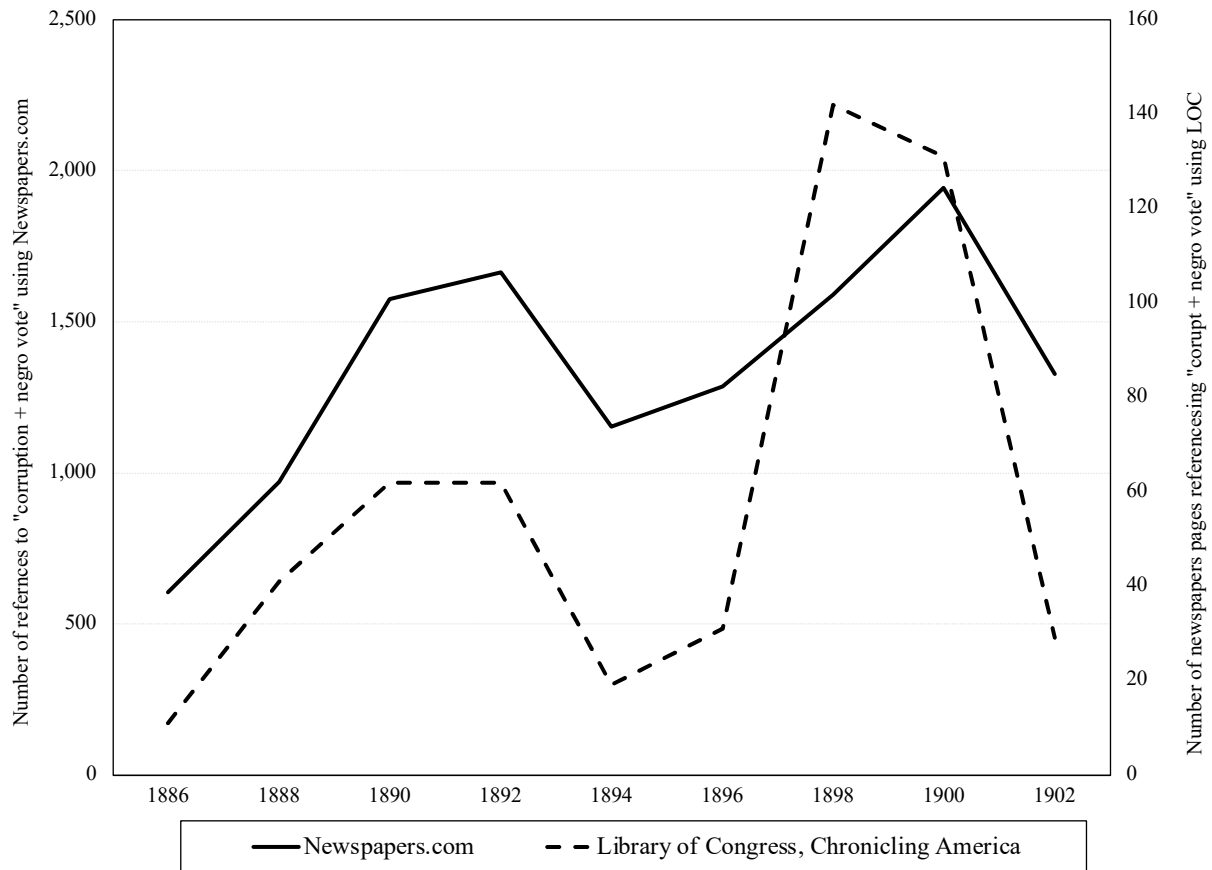
Table A10: Estimates of the effect of Populist support in 1892 on measures of anti-Black propaganda during the first and second critical elections periods

	Dependent Variable: Corrupt + Negro Vote		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Panel A: First Critical Election Period			
Populist Vote Share for President in 1892	-21.24 (44.27)		-21.24 (44.27)
Populist Threat in 1892		19.58 (36.09)	21.70 (38.29)
Demographic Controls	YES	YES	YES
Economic Controls	YES	YES	YES
County and Year Fixed Effects	YES	YES	YES
$R^2$	0.875	0.875	0.875
Panel B: Second Critical Election Period			
Populist Vote Share for President in 1892	-12.35 (11.71)		-12.34 (11.71)
Populist Threat in 1892		38.33 (37.87)	39.56 (39.02)
Demographic Controls	YES	YES	YES
Economic Controls	YES	YES	YES
County and Year Fixed Effects	YES	YES	YES
$R^2$	0.945	0.945	0.945

**Notes:** Robust standard errors in parentheses, \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.1$ . All models are estimated using fixed effects and standard errors are clustered at the county level. Periods include first and second critical election periods defined by Table 2. Populist threat is measured as any Populist vote share in the presidential election of 1892 over zero which is similar to the measure used by Ottinger and Winkler (2022).

**Source:** Author's calculations.

Figure A1: Comparing Newspapers.com and the Library of Congress searches for “corrupt + negro vote



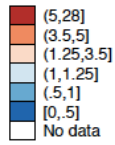
**Note:** Data is for election years only (non-election years excluded) for the period from 1886 to 1902. Data also includes only searches relating to newspapers published in Southern states.

**Source:** Author’s calculations using data from *Newspapers.com* and Library of Congress’ Chronicling America historical newspaper database.

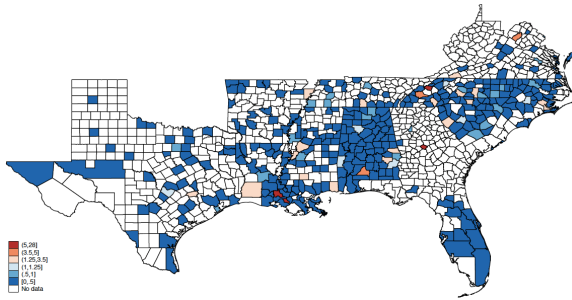
Figure A2: Within county variation in references to “corrupt + negro vote”

Legend for figures below:

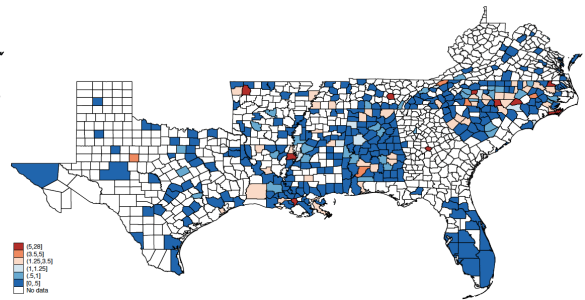
*Note: For some years the highest ratio is 30 and not 28. This includes 1892, 1894, 1898, 1900, and 1902.*



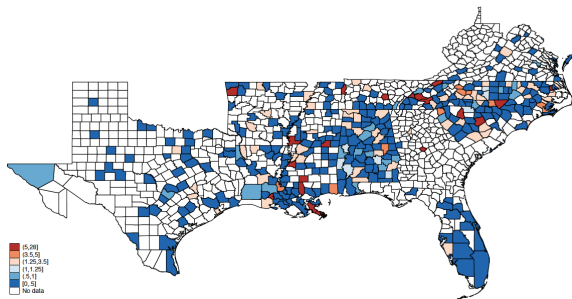
1886



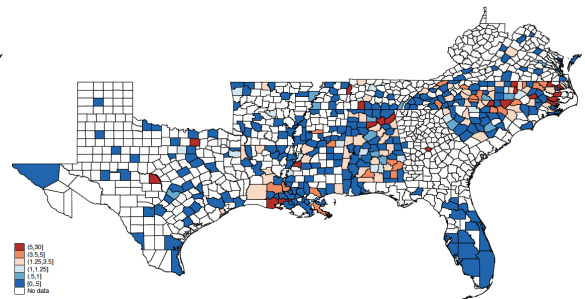
1888



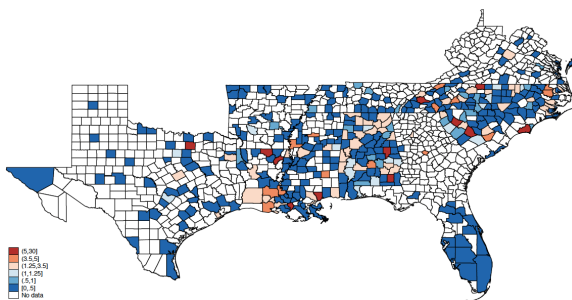
1890



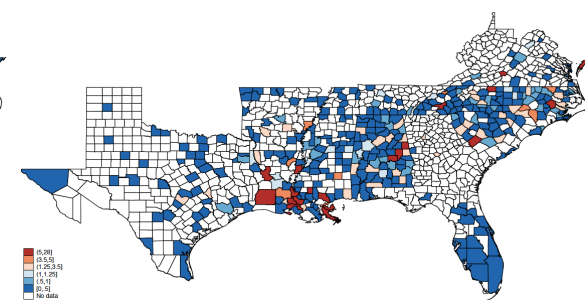
1892



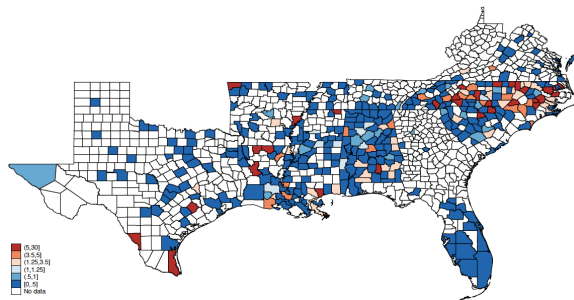
1894



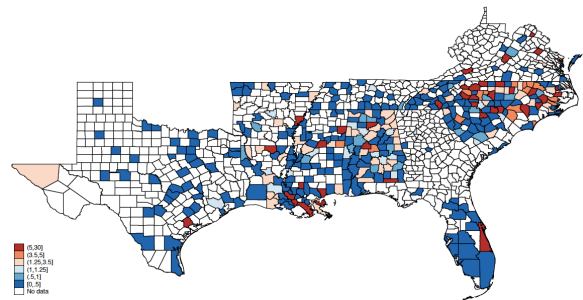
1896



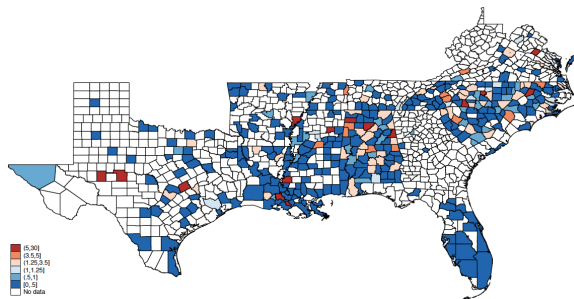
**1898**



**1900**



**1902**



**Notes:** Thresholds for each of the categories represent the ratio between the number of references published in a county in a given year relative to the average number of references in that county over the period from 1870 to 1920. The thresholds greater than one (1.25, 3.5, and 5.5) were chosen so as to approximate the 75<sup>th</sup>, 90<sup>th</sup>, and 95<sup>th</sup> percentiles for the ratio described above.

**Source:** Author's calculations using data described in Section 3.