Black Newspapers and Partisanship*

Brian Beach
Vanderbilt University
and NBER

Martin Saavedra
Rutgers University

João Tampellini
Vanderbilt University

December 19, 2024

Abstract

The late 19th century saw the emergence of the Black press, with roughly 3000 newspapers opening between 1865 and 1920. We provide new evidence establishing that Black newspapers covered politics more intensely and that the coverage was more favorable to the Republican Party. We assess the impact of these newspapers by comparing electoral outcomes in counties that receive a Black newspaper in time to cover a presidential election to those that receive their Black newspaper after the relevant election. Consistent with historical narratives, our stacked difference-in-differences design indicates that Black newspaper openings helped garner support for the Republican Party. Balance tests, event studies, and results from the analysis of over 20 million newspaper pages help validate the parallel trends assumption that underpins our research design.

*Communication can be sent to Beach: brian.beach@vanderbilt.edu, Saavedra: martin.saavedra@rutgers.edu, or Tampellini: joao.p.tampellini@vanderbilt.edu. Thanks to Cameron Deal, Walker Hanlon, Pat Testa, and Tianyi Wang for their helpful comments. We have also benefited from audience participation at Vanderbilt University, the 2024 Western Economic Association's Annual Meeting, and the 2024 Econometric Society Summer Meeting.

> *The negro editor, by virtue of his position, has not only become a live factor in our American body-politic as a dictator and molder of public opinion, in common with the white man, but he is the spokesman of the race, and the guardian of its best interests.*
>
> William S. Scarborough on the success of Black newspapers, as quoted from Penn (1891, p. 431)

1 Introduction

The post-Reconstruction era is often characterized by efforts to undercut Black political participation. Voter suppression occurred through formal and informal channels. Formal channels included poll taxes, literacy tests, and other legal mechanisms (Kousser, 1974) whereas informal channels included violence/intimidation and propaganda (Key, 1949; Jones et al., 2017; Ottinger and Posch, 2024). Although each factor's relative contribution to the effective disenfranchisement of Black voters remains debated, it is generally understood that Black political participation was stifled, with important consequences for policymaking.[1]

One historical narrative that is comparatively understudied is the ability of Black people to generate countervailing effects. Penn (1891), for instance, surveyed 20 eminent Black leaders about the impact of Black newspapers. The respondents, which included Frederick Douglass, John R. Lynch, John Mercer Langston, Booker T. Washington, and others, argued that that Black newspapers were successful in unifying Black people and shaping public opinion on the issues that concern Black people.

This paper validates this narrative evidence by examining the influence of Black newspapers on political participation, 1880-1925. This period corresponds with the rapid emergence of the Black press. Between 1875 and 1900 the number of active Black newspapers increased from about 40 to over 400. The peak of activity occurred in 1920, when roughly 550 Black newspapers were in operation and about 60% of the Black population in the United States

[1]See, for instance Margo (1990, Ch. 3), Naidu (2012), and the citations within. While much of this literature focuses on local provision of education, Cascio and Washington (2014) offers compelling evidence linking voter suppression to federal policymaking. That study shows that the 1965 Voting Rights Act's removal of literacy tests affected voter registration and the distribution of resources.

resided in a county with an active Black newspaper.[2] Existing work (e.g. Simmons, 2006) assesses the influence of prominent publications. Our empirical approach, which considers the effect of *any* Black newspaper, offers a complementary perspective by examining the impact of the typical Black newspaper.

We begin by establishing that, relative to white newspapers, Black newspapers had greater coverage of politics and were more pro-Republican. These results are based on over 20 million digitized newspaper pages appearing in the Library of Congress' *Chronicling America*. Black newspapers have a greater share of pages that mention keywords relating to politics, politicians, and political parties. We then analyze the words that appear in close proximity to those keywords to assess partisanship.[3] The results indicate that Black newspapers are more likely to discuss political participation, more likely to report on political leaders, and more likely to use pro-Republican language.

Next, we examine the influence of Black newspapers on political participation. We use a stacked difference-in-differences design that examines county-level outcomes from each presidential election. Our research design borrows from Beach and Hanlon (2023) in that we leverage variation in newspaper openings over a narrow time frame. Counties that receive a Black newspaper in time to operate during the presidential election of interest are compared to counties that receive a Black newspaper one or two years after the election of interest. Balance tests suggest that our treated counties are slightly larger at the time of treatment, but are otherwise comparable to our control counties. Furthermore, event studies suggest that our measures of political participation were trending similarly in treatment and control counties. These features increase our confidence in the validity of the parallel trends assumption that underpins our research design.

We find that the opening of a Black newspaper led to an increase in support for the Republican Party, the party historically associated with the abolitionist movement. The

[2]A deeper discussion of these trends and the underlying data appears in Section 2.

[3]This analysis builds on the toolkit introduced by Gentzkow and Shapiro (2010) and Gentzkow et al. (2019).

Republican vote share in treated counties increased by 1.7 percentage points following the opening of a Black newspaper, as compared to control counties. This effect is sizable, corresponding to 5% of the sample mean. We see limited effects on turnout, which we interpret as evidence that Black newspapers were more effective at changing preferences among existing voters than they were at encouraging new voters to participate in the political process.

One important factor to consider is how the existing media landscape and market characteristics influenced the effectiveness of Black newspapers in shaping political opinions. We investigate whether the presence of pre-existing Republican newspapers influenced the effectiveness of Black newspapers. We provide evidence that Black newspapers had a stronger impact on electoral outcomes in counties without a Republican newspaper, suggesting that they likely provided new political perspectives to that market. We also find that Black newspapers had stronger effects in counties with higher Black literacy rates, indicating that the market size of potential readers was an important element of their effectiveness.

We then move to investigate the role of formal and informal mechanisms of voter suppression. We test whether franchise-restricting legislation — such as poll taxes, literacy tests, and multiple ballot requirements — affected the impact of Black newspapers on political participation. These laws, mostly enacted during the 1890s and 1900s, were exclusive to some Southern states and aimed to restrict Black political participation. We find that Black newspapers were much less effective in increasing the Republican vote shares in the presence of such legislation. Additionally, we find that even in the absence of formal legislation, the political environment of former Confederate states, characterized by systemic barriers and strong loyalty to the Democratic Party, also reduced the impact of Black newspapers.

One competing hypothesis that we attempt to rule out is that Black newspapers opened in response to (or alongside of) unobservable changes in political participation. To better understand the social and economic standing of Black people at the local-level, we apply Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) to the Chronicling America database to create a county-level panel dataset of race-related topic coverage. Topics fall into three distinct categories: polit-

ical organization/participation, violence and crime, and job ads. Results from our stacked difference-in-differences design indicate that, if anything, there is a decrease in political organization and an increase in crime and violence. Job ads appear to be stable across the pre- and post-treatment periods. Given the well-documented link that lynchings decrease political participation (Jones et al., 2017; Williams, 2022), these results appear inconsistent with the idea that Black newspapers were part of a broader push to increase political participation.

We also address the possibility that Black newspapers were a part of a wider movement to increase Republican support in newspapers. Using measures of partisan phrasing usage from (Gentzkow et al., 2019), we show that following the opening of a Black newspaper, other local newspapers decrease the usage of partisan language. This decrease is observed in both Democratic and Republican language.

This paper contributes to a small but growing literature in economics that uses comprehensive directory data to study Black entrepreneurship. Cook et al. (2022, 2023), for instance, study Black business districts in the United States (1939-1955). These papers highlight the role of social and economic forces in determining the under-provision of Black-friendly businesses. Unlike restaurants and other public accommodations, newspapers can be consumed off site. This means that newspaper publishers likely faced a different set of incentives when it came to enforcing racially segregated consumption patterns. In fact, our heterogeneity results suggest that Black newspapers must have persuaded some white voters to increase their support for the Republican Party. Specifically, we see that the effects are larger in the north and in places with *smaller* Black population shares. These findings thus offer an example of a feedback mechanism where Black entrepreneurship alters the same beliefs and opinions that help determine other types of entrepreneurial activity.[4]

This paper also offers a new perspective on media slant in historical newspaper markets.

[4]While not a story about Black newspapers, a similar mechanism exists in Albright et al. (2021). One result in that paper is that Black individuals residing in areas with greater newspaper coverage of the Tulsa Race Massacre are less likely to become homeowners and entrepreneurs. Here, the shock to beliefs is an updated assessment of ones risk of being targeted by racialized violence.

Gentzkow and Shapiro (2010) and Gentzkow et al. (2014) were among the first to conclude that newspaper slant (as measured by a newspaper's political affiliation) was largely a function of consumer demand. The historical narrative asserts that Black newspapers were instrumental in giving a voice to Black people, which leads us to conclude that our findings are likely operating through an information channel rather than a slant channel. In this sense, our paper is more similar to Wang (Forthcoming), which shows that the arrival of the telegraph increased newspaper coverage of national politics and increased voter turnout in subsequent presidential elections.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides an overview of the rise of the Black press in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Section 3 uses digitized newspaper data for over 20 million pages to establish that Black newspapers were more political and more pro-Republican during our period of interest. Section 4 presents our research design and main results assessing the impact of Black newspapers on political participation. Section 5 explores the heterogeneity of our results while Section 6 returns to our database of newspaper content to further rule out likely confounders such as changing racial tensions or underlying changes in political preferences. Section 7 concludes.

2 The Rise of the Black Press

Black newspapers first emerged in the U.S. during the early 19th century. Part of this timing might be explained by technological change. Due to heavy taxes and regulation, 18th century newspapers catered to wealthier readers and other special interests. Mechanized paper-making and falling taxes reduced production costs, and newspaper publishers responded by increasing advertising and expanding circulation. This increased independence, as newspapers could survive without the sponsorship of political parties (Petrova, 2011). Cheaper newspapers also opened up the possibility of serving new populations of readers.

Financial incentives, however, are not enough to explain the emergence of Black newspapers. Penn (1891) uses the experience of 17 Black newspapers and over 100 Black editors, journalists, and publishers to tell the story of the emergence of the Black press in the 19th century. A central theme is that Black newspapers required perseverance and a willingness to incur great personal sacrifices. Many Black newspapers struggled to achieve commercial success. No pre-Civil War Black newspaper, for example, survived the conflict (Bullock, 1981). Black newspapers' financial struggles were often exacerbated by white businesses' refusal to buy advertising space (Pride and Wilson, 1997).[5] As such, Black newspapers relied more heavily on subscriptions and voluntary donations.

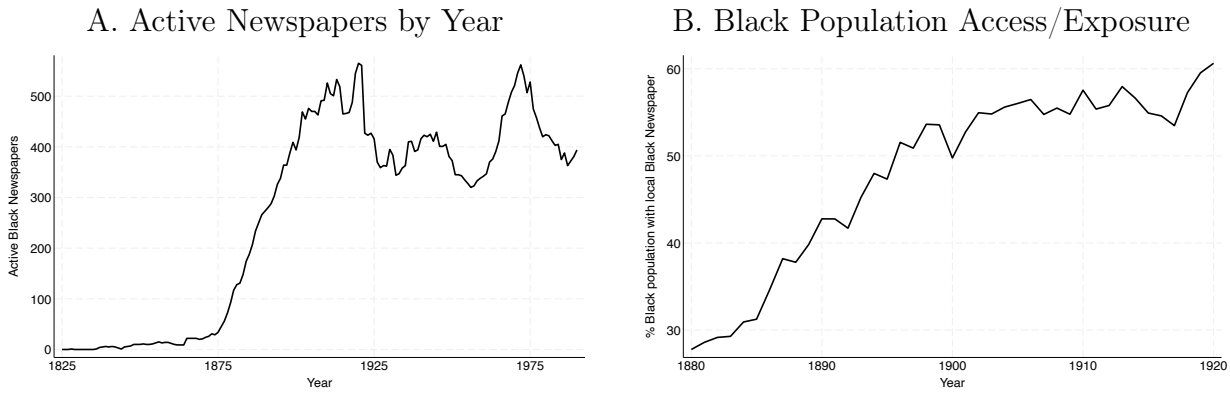
Figure 1 depicts the emergence of the Black press. The top panel plots the number of active newspapers by year. Our source of openings and closings is Henritze (1995), which were identified from over one hundred advertising directories, union lists, African American yearbooks, and historical repositories from State and local governments.[6] We define a Black newspaper as a publication edited by a Black editor and/or focused primarily on the Black experience.[7] We observe the rapid emergence between 1875 (when about 40 newspapers were in operation) to 1900 (when about 400 newspapers were in operation), as well as the slight dip in activity after 1925 and the subsequent rise around 1960. The uptick in openings after 1875 also appears for daily newspapers (see Appendix Figure A1), which suggests that these openings might have been influenced by broader economic or technological changes in the media market. The bottom panel plots the share of the U.S. Black population residing in a county with an active Black newspaper. Again, we see the peak around 1900 when about 55% of the Black population resided in a county with an active Black newspaper.

[5]This makes archival work more difficult, as copies of newspapers operating for only a few years may not have survived.

[6]Henritze (1995) builds upon Brown (1946), a sociologist at Lincoln University, which identified 467 Black newspapers that opened between 1827 and 1946.

[7]As Henritze (1995) compiles information from hundreds of sources, she does not provide a single definition of a Black newspaper. In some of her sources, such as the N.W. Ayer and Son's *American Newspaper Annual and Directory* and Rowell's *American Newspaper Directory*, Black newspapers are identified as "Negro" or "Colored". We opt to provide a wider definition that includes publications compiled by all sources.

Figure 1: Documenting the Rise of the Black Press



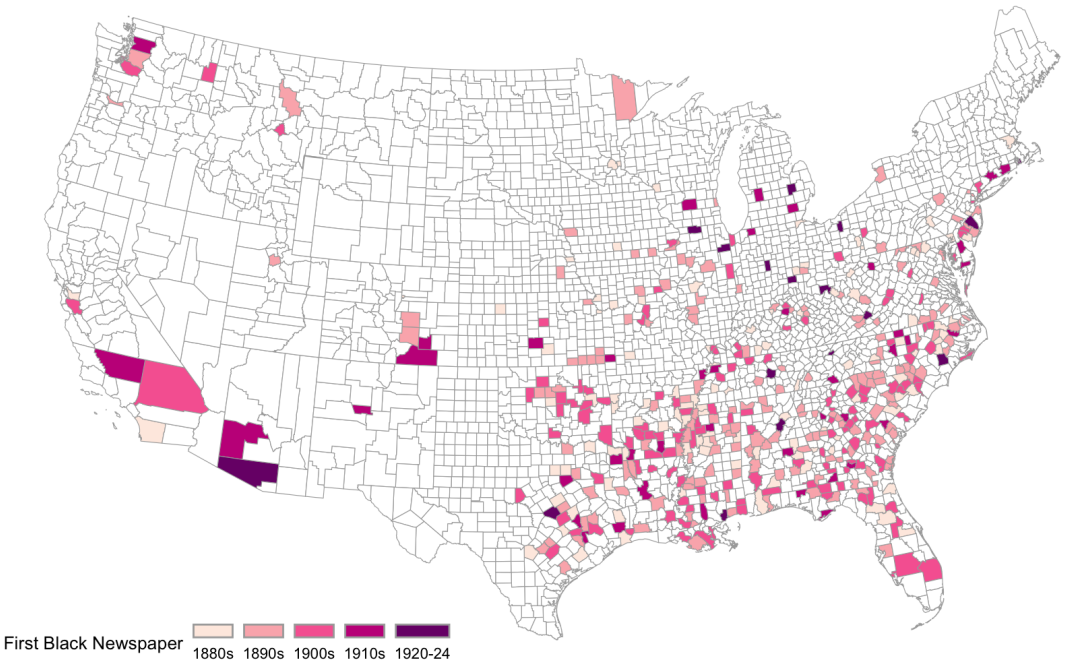
Note: Newspaper openings and closings from Henritze (1995). Black population linearly interpolated from county-level census tabulations. County boundaries adjusted following Ferrara et al. (2024)

Figure 2 shows the timing and spatial variation of our newspaper openings. Counties that receive a Black newspaper during our analysis period are more likely to be located in the South. This is perhaps unsurprising since during this period most Black people also resided in the South. This will not be a concern for our analysis since our empirical approach as our control group will consist of counties that receive a Black newspaper at some later date.

3 Black Newspapers and Partisanship

Black newspapers are known for providing a public platform for political organization in the Black community. Notable abolitionists such as Fredrick Douglass and Mary Ann Shad Cary edited multiple publications prior to the abolition of slavery. Other examples include Ida B. Wells' *Memphis Free Speech and Headlight*, which led an international anti-lynching campaign in the 1890s, and Robert Sengstacke Abbott's *Chicago Defender*, which promoted the Great Migration from the south to the northern U.S. These publications were often open about their role in promoting Black political participation. Consider the first Black newspaper in the U.S., New York City's *Freedom's Journal*, which opened in 1827. The opening text of the inaugural issue reads as follows:

Figure 2: Newspaper Opening Locations During Period of Study



Note: Newspaper openings and closings from Henritze (1995). 1920 county boundary shape file from Mullen and Bratt (2018).

> *"We wish to plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us. Too long has the publick [sic] been deceived by misrepresentations, in things which concern us dearly, ... The civil rights of a people being of the greatest value, it shall ever be our duty to vindicate our brethren, when oppressed; and to lay the case before the publick [sic]."*
>
> John Brown Russworm and Samuel Cornish, Freedom's Journal, March 16th 1827.

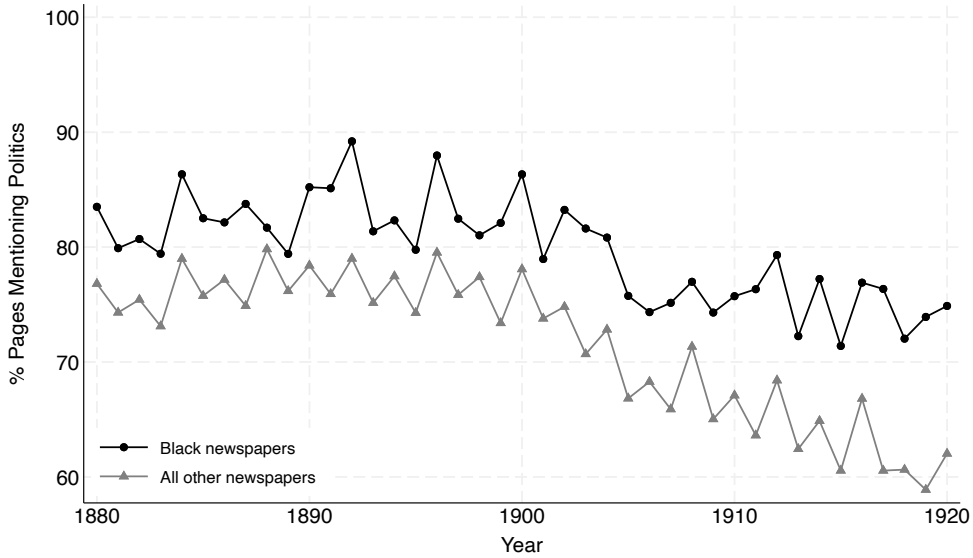
One way to further establish the political focus of Black newspapers is to examine their content. The Library of Congress' *Chronicling America* archive provides over 20 million digitized newspaper pages, their date of publication, the newspaper title, and a short description of the newspapers. We use this database and identify a newspaper as a Black newspaper if its title or description include the words "negro", "African", "colored", or "Afro." We search through each page and identify the number of pages that mention a word with any of the

following politically-themed sub-strings: President, Congress, Democrat, Republican, and politic.[8]

Figure 3 shows the political focus of Black newspapers relative to white newspapers. The y-axis is the share of newspaper pages that mention politics. From 1880-1900 the share of Black newspapers pages mentioning politics averaged about 85% while in other newspapers the average is about 78%. The political emphasis we observe in Black newspapers is not easily explained by the format of the newspapers or the markets in which they operate. In Appendix Table A1 we regress (at the newspaper-level) this same measure of annual politics page share on an indicator variable that equals one if the newspaper is a Black newspaper. We find that the share of newspaper pages mentioning politics is 7.4 percentage points higher for Black newspapers. This point estimate is largely unaffected when we add an indicator for whether the newspaper is a daily newspaper or not (Column 2) or when we add county and year fixed effects (Column 3).

[8]This list will include many variants of these words, such as Presidents, Presidential, Congressional, Democrats, Democratic, Republicans, politics, political, politician, and politicians.

Figure 3: Share of Pages Mentioning Politics by Newspaper Type



Note: A page is defined as mentioning politics if it contains any of the following politically-themed substrings: President, Congress, Democrat, Republican, and politic. Content data from The Library of Congress' *Chronicling America* archive. Black newspapers are identified from the names and locations provided in Henritze (1995).

Having established the greater political focus of Black newspapers, we now set out to understand differences in political content. We begin by collecting every word within 10 words of one of our political tokens (Republican, Democrat, Congress, President, and the stem "Politic*"). We then remove words that are assumed to be too insignificant to convey meaning. Our first step is to remove stop words (e.g., the, and, a).[9] For the remaining words we apply the Porter-Stemming algorithm to remove suffixes. We remove the corresponding stems that are either common (over 100,000 counts) or rare (fewer than 1,000 counts). This leaves us with 8980 unique stems.

We test the null hypothesis that Black and white newspapers used the same stems with the same probability. Formally, we calculate the following χ^2 statistic:

$$\chi_i^2 = \frac{\left(f_{i,\text{Black}} f_{\sim i,\text{white}} - f_{i,\text{white}} f_{\sim i,\text{Black}}\right)^2}{\left(f_{i,\text{Black}} + f_{i,\text{white}}\right)\left(f_{i,\text{Black}} + f_{\sim i,\text{Black}}\right)\left(f_{i,\text{white}} + f_{\sim i,\text{white}}\right)\left(f_{\sim i,\text{Black}} + f_{\sim i,\text{white}}\right)}$$

[9]We use the stop words from the Natural Language Tool Kit python package Bird et al. (2009)

where $f_{i,\text{Black}}$ is the frequency count of stem i for Black newspapers, and $f_{\sim i,\text{Black}}$ is the frequency of stems that are not i for Black newspapers. The frequencies $f_{i,\text{white}}$ and $f_{\sim i,\text{white}}$ are defined similarly. This test is what Gentzkow and Shapiro (2010) used to identify partisan language.

Appendix Table A4 displays 100 stems that correspond to the most statistically-significant differences in usage (i.e., the largest χ^2 statistics). The stems in the Black newspaper columns are those for which Black newspapers use that stem with a higher probability than white newspapers. The stems are listed in descending order, with larger differences appearing closer to the top.

One way to better understand this table is to consider the stems referring to geography. Overrepresented stems in Black newspapers include *Southern*, *Carolina*, and *Mississippi*. Stems overrepresented in white newspapers include *Omaha*, *Nebraska*, *Salt*, *Lake*, and *Utah*. This tells us that if a newspaper mentions "carolina" in close proximity to one of our political keywords, then it is much more likely that the newspaper is a Black newspaper than would be expected by random chance. Conversely, if we see "salt lake" or "Nebraska" in close proximity to one of our political keywords, then it is more likely that the newspaper is a white newspaper than would be expected. These patterns are likely explained by the concentration of Black newspapers in the south and the comparatively fewer Black newspapers in the west.

Non-geographic stems provide more information on the differences in content. Black newspapers are more likely to discuss race in close proximity to politics. The stems *color*, *negro*, and *white* are all in the top ten, with *afroamerican* also in the top 100. Black newspapers are also more likely to mention elections and voting, with the stem *primari* being the most overrepresented stem in Black newspapers and the stem *voter* also appearing on the list. The list also indicates that Black newspapers are also more likely to discuss specific politicians (e.g., Taft, Tillman, and Hadley) or other prominent figures as the titles Rev. and Hon. are also more likely to appear in Black newspapers.

These results indicate that Black newspapers were informing readers about politicians

and the political process. Out of the top 100 stems, 85 appear more frequently in Black newspapers, whereas only 15 appear more frequently in white newspapers. This is consistent with Black newspapers using a wider vocabulary. If, for instance, Black newspapers were more likely to discuss politicians and voting instead of policies, then we would expect policy-oriented stems (e.g., tax or spend) to be overrepresented in white newspapers and thus appear in the white newspaper column. That fewer stems are overrepresented in white newspapers suggests that Black newspapers use a larger vocabulary while reducing the use of many common words by a small probability.

Historical Black newspapers were also known for their support of the Republican Party, which was more supportive of Reconstruction and Black political participation during this period (Heersink and Jenkins, 2020). There is ample qualitative evidence indicating that the Republican Party was viewed as the protector of Black enfranchisement and civil rights: Calvin Chase's *The Washington Bee* claimed that "our safety is in God and the Republican Party", while John Mitchell's *Richmond Planet* compared Republican then-presidential candidate William McKinley to a "modern Moses" (Beatty, 1980). The unwavering support by Black papers to Republican candidates would last until the 1920s, when some Black newspapers turned to endorse the Democratic Party. In 1932, Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt defeated Republican Herbert Hoover with the support of all major Black newspapers (Snorgrass, 1986).

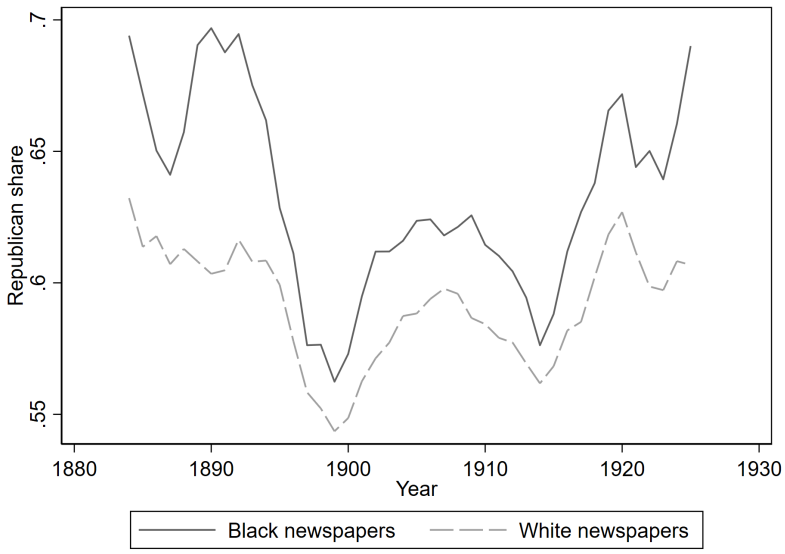
To provide a systematic analysis of Black newspapers' support for the Republican Party, we use page-level data to understand partisan bias. We obtain a list of partisan phrases (after Porter stemming) published by Gentzkow et al. (2019).[10] Their paper uses Congressional Speech data to identify the most partisan phrases for each Congress. We take the top 10 Republican and top 10 Democratic phrases from each Congress that overlaps with our sample (for a total of 480 phrases). We then count the share of phrases that are slanted towards Republican as our measure of partisanship. If the same bigram is slanted towards a party in

[10]Gentzkow et al. (2019) define these phrases as two-word terms (bigrams) closely associated with a political party.

more than one Congress, we take that as evidence that that bigram was especially partisan and weight it by the number of appearances in the Gentzkow et al. (2019) phrase list.

A time series of partisanship by newspaper race is displayed in Figure 4. To reduce noise, the figure displays a 5-year moving average. While both newspapers tend to fluctuate with roughly similar trends, for every year, the 5-year moving average is more Republican for Black newspapers than for white newspapers. The use of Republican phrases is not easily explained by newspaper format or location. Appendix Table A2 shows that Black newspapers use relatively more Republican phrases than white newspapers. The estimates remain similar in magnitude after the inclusion of an indicator for daily newspapers (column 2) and county and year fixed effects (column 3).

Figure 4: Share of partisan phrases that are Republican



Notes: Partisanship is measured by the share of phrases from Gentzkow et al. (2019) that are classified as Republican. Each line represents a 5-year moving average. Data are from the 1880 to 1925 *Chronicling America* newspaper archive and are limited to text within 10 words of a political token.

4 Black Newspapers and Political Participation

The results in Section 3 illustrated that Black newspapers offered a distinct and pro-Republican party perspective. Keeping this in mind, we now set out to understand whether Black newspapers also affected electoral outcomes and political participation.

4.1 Empirical Approach

We use a stacked difference-in-differences estimator to identify how Black newspapers affect political participation. First, we choose an election of interest (e.g., $e = 1880$). The treated group is composed of the set of counties that did not have an active Black newspaper in the previous election (e.g, 1876), but did have an active newspaper at the time of the relevant election. The control counties are those that did not have an active Black newspaper at the time of the relevant presidential election or the prior election but do receive an active newspaper in the year or two after the relevant election. This set of treatment and control counties forms a stack for the relevant election year, comparing counties that received a Black newspaper in time for the following election to those that received a Black newspaper just after the election. Importantly, we restrict the post-period to a single election, as both treated and control counties could have an active Black newspaper in election $e + 1$. We repeat this process for each relevant election (e.g., 1884, 1888, 1892, etc.). Once we have all of our election stacks, we estimate the following equation:

$$\mathrm{Y}_{cte} = \alpha + \beta \mathbb{1}[\text{Newspaper Opened}] + \gamma_{te} + \tau_{ce} + \varepsilon_{cte} \tag{1}$$

where Y_{cte} is the voting outcome of interest in county c and year t, as observed in stack e. The variable γ_{te} captures our stack-by-year fixed effects, while the variable τ_{ce} captures our stack-by-county fixed effects. Interacting our county and year fixed effects with our election stack indicators ensures that all treatment and control comparisons occur within each stack. The estimate of interest is β, which corresponds to the average difference in outcomes for

treated counties in the treatment period. For all of our regressions, standard errors are clustered at the county level and regressions are weighted by the Black population of each county.

Table 1 validates our research design by showing that treatment timing is uncorrelated with relevant social and economic characteristics. Columns 1 and 2 show the within-stack pre-treatment means for treated and control counties, respectively, for a range of outcomes. We choose to report within-stack statistics since, in this design, the same county can be categorized into either the treatment or the control group across stacks. Prior to treatment, counties with Black newspapers had larger population following (Gentzkow et al., 2011a), but with similar racial composition to control counties. Across other relevant characteristics, such as population growth, rate of change in the Republican vote and political participation, and racial violence,[11] we find no statistically significant difference between treated and control counties.

We complement this analysis with time-invariant characteristics. Prior to our analysis, treated and control counties had no differential agricultural productivity, cotton productivity, density of churches, share of the population who were either slaveowners or enslaved. We find that treated counties had a slightly higher voter registration rate for Black individuals following the Civil War (Hume and Gough, 2008; Logan, 2020), but the difference is small. Finally, using data from Southern Poverty Law Center (2024), we find no statistical difference in Confederate memorialization across treated and control counties.

4.2 Main Results

Table 2 displays the results from our stacked difference-in-differences design. Our four main outcomes are: share of votes to the Republican presidential candidate, Republican and non-Republican turnout,[12] and the probability that the Republican candidate wins the presiden-

[11] Measured by lynchings killing Black individuals per 10,000 Black inhabitants in the previous 4 years.

[12] That is, for county c and election year e, $\text{RepublicanTurnout}_{ce} = \frac{\text{Republican Votes}_{ce}}{\text{Population}_{ce}} \times 100$, and $\text{NonRepublicanTurnout}_{ce} = \frac{\text{Total Votes}_{ce} - \text{Republican Votes}_{ce}}{\text{Population}_{ce}} \times 100$

Table 1: Balance Table

	Within-stack Treated Mean (1)	Within-stack Control Mean (2)	Difference (3)
Panel A: Time-Varying Characteristics			
% Republican$_{e-1}$ - % Republican$_{e-2}$	-2.048	-1.929	-0.118
			(0.733)
% Turnout$_{e-1}$ - % Turnout$_{e-2}$	-0.561	-0.676	0.115
			(0.205)
Log(Population)	10.139	10.021	0.118***
			(0.030)
% Black	54.964	55.180	-0.216
			(1.774)
% Pop. growth since previous election	10.786	11.359	-0.573
			(0.673)
% Black Literacy	26.591	25.636	0.955
			(0.820)
Black Lynchings/10k Black inhabitants	0.310	0.432	-0.122
			(0.157)
Daily Newspapers/10k inhabitants	0.588	0.659	-0.071**
			(0.034)
Panel B: Time-Invariant Characteristics			
Confederate Monuments/10k inhabitants	0.325	0.320	0.004
			(0.020)
1867-69 % Black Vote Registration	22.769	22.003	0.766*
			(0.441)
1860 Census			
Log(Cotton Output/Capita)	2.688	2.732	-0.044
			(0.105)
% Enslaved Population	41.383	40.513	0.869
			(0.991)
% Free Black Pop.	1.454	1.322	0.132
			(0.123)
% Slaveholding Population	3.725	3.666	0.059
			(0.051)
1870 Census			
Log(Agricultural Productivity)	4.041	4.047	-0.005
			(0.024)
Log(# Churches/Population)	-6.385	-6.347	-0.038
			(0.026)
Counties		496	

Notes: This table shows pre-treatment within-stack means and differences for select characteristics for treated and control counties as per the research design described in Section 4.1. Column 1 shows means for counties that had an active Black newspaper by the relevant election and Column 2 shows means for counties that would receive a Black newspaper soon after the election. For time-varying characteristics, the data is restricted to pre-treatment years. Column 3 reports the difference in means, i.e. the coefficient on $Treated$ of a simple OLS regression. Panel A is composed of time-varying characteristics, and Panel B is composed of time-invariant characteristics using information from Southern Poverty Law Center (2024); Hume and Gough (2008); Logan (2020), as well as the U.S. population and agricultural censuses of 1860 and 1870.
* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

tial contest in each county. Focusing on Presidential elections allows us to compare outcomes across counties and states, as presidential candidates run national campaigns with uniform platforms. We find that Black newspapers are associated with a 1.73 p.p. increase in the Republican vote share, equivalent to a 5% increase in Republican support. This change, however, is not large enough to change county-level electoral outcomes: we do not detect a statistically significant change in the probability that the Republican presidential candidate wins a county. We decompose turnout across partisan lines and find that the increase in Republican support is due to a reallocation of votes, with the Republican turnout increasing by roughly 0.3 p.p. and the non-Republican turnout decreasing by roughly 0.3 p.p. That is, the higher Republican vote share is a result of shifting preferences and not of increased political participation.

Table 2: Effects of Black Newspapers on Electoral Outcomes

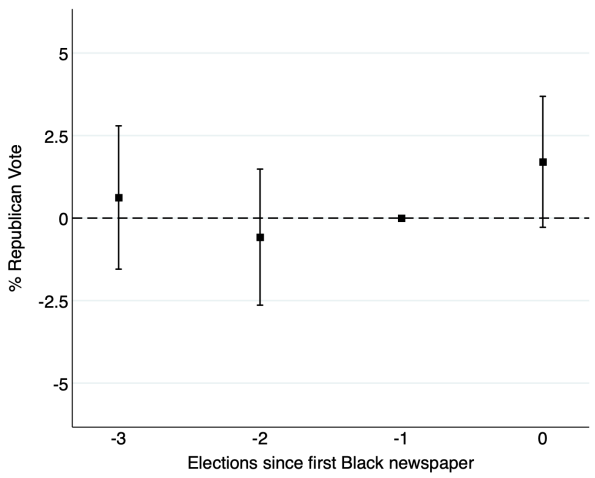
	% Republican Vote	Republican Turnout	Non-Republican Turnout	Pr(Republican Victory)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
𝟙[Active Black Newspaper]	1.728**	0.331**	-0.305*	0.031
	(0.841)	(0.167)	(0.161)	(0.023)
Observations	3,316	3,316	3,316	3,316
Mean of Dep. Var.	35.27	6.44	9.16	0.30

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard errors, clustered at the county-level, in parentheses.

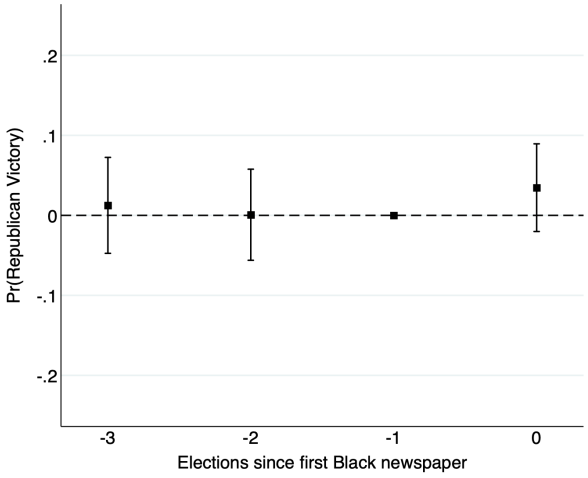
We provide further evidence of the effect of Black newspapers on electoral outcomes through event studies on Figure 5. Each point estimate shows the differences in electoral outcomes for counties with an active newspaper and counties that would receive a Black newspaper shortly after the election. The omitted period is the last election prior to the entry of a Black newspaper in treated counties. Figure 5a shows the dynamics for the Republican vote share. Prior to the introduction of a Black newspaper, treated and control counties trended similarly. After the introduction of a Black newspaper, however, Republican presidential candidates increase their vote share by roughly 1.75 p.p.. Figure 5b shows similar

pre-trends, indistinguishable from zero, and an insignificant yet suggestive increase in the probability of a Republican candidate winning the county contest. Finally, Figures 5c and 5d show that treated and control counties were on a similar trajectory in terms of political participation but, following the introduction of a Black newspaper, Republican candidates earn proportionally more votes while non-Republicans earn fewer votes. The effects are virtually symmetrical, being opposite in sign and similar in magnitude.

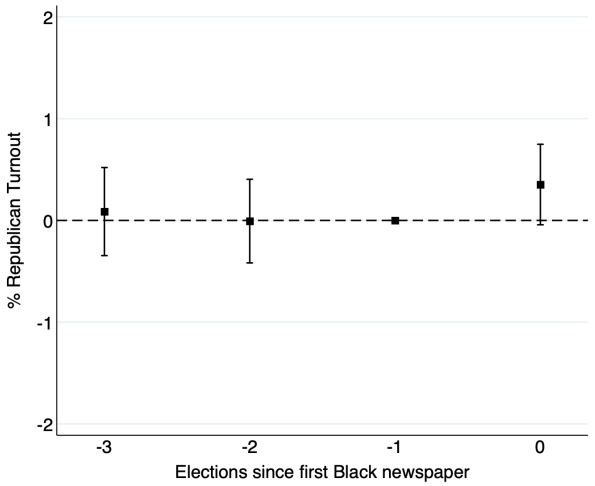
Figure 5: Effects of Black Newspapers on Electoral Outcomes



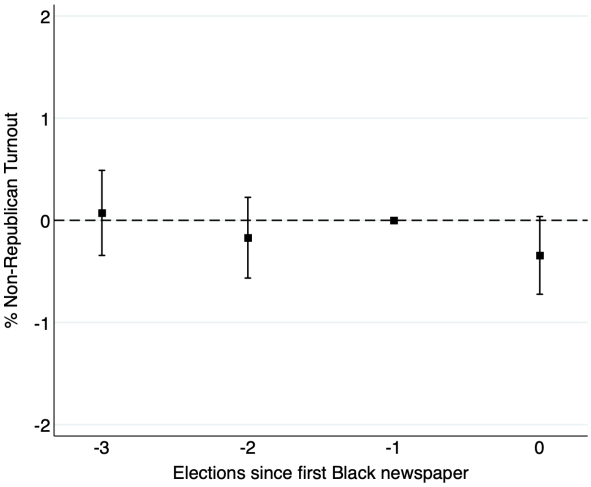
(a) % Republican Vote



(b) Pr(Republican Winner)



(c) % Republican Turnout



(d) % Non-Republican Turnout

We perform a series of tests to assess the sensitivity of our results. First, following the

approach developed by Rambachan and Roth (2023), we test the robustness of our main result, the Republican vote share, to the violation of the parallel trends assumption to varying degrees. We show in Appendix Figure A2 that our "breakdown value" is around $\bar{M} = 0.2$. That is, we can reject a null effect at the 10% confidence interval as long as post-treatment violations of parallel trends are smaller than 0.2 percentage points, roughly equivalent to 10% of our treatment effect.

To account for the changing dynamics in race relations across different areas of the United States, we present our main results with the inclusion of region-by-year-by-stack fixed effects in Appendix Table A3. This strategy accounts for variation in region and time-specific factors across elections, which include, for example, the rise of racial tensions in the early 20th century, particularly in the South. Our coefficients are qualitatively equivalent to the main specification, and larger in magnitude. Interestingly, we detect a statistically significant increase in the probability of a Republican candidate winning the county.

5 Mechanisms of Political Influence

The evidence presented so far points to Black newspapers increasing local support for Republican presidential candidates, with little evidence of increased political participation. In this section, we discuss the ways in which the emergence of the Black press helped shape public opinions during our period of study.

5.1 Market Size and Structure

First, we examine whether the effectiveness of Black newspapers in mobilizing Republican support was influenced by the presence of pre-existing Republican newspapers in these counties. In counties with no existing Republican newspapers, Black newspapers may have provided a novel perspective on political issues, leading to higher Republican support. Conversely, in counties with pre-existing Republican newspapers, the market for pro-Republican

information may have been saturated, making Black newspapers less impactful in shaping public opinion. We collect information on newspaper availability and partisan affiliation from Gentzkow et al. (2011b) and fully interact an indicator variable equal to one if a county has an active Republican newspaper with the coefficient on $\mathbb{1}$[Active Black Newspaper] from Equation 1. Results are shown in Panel A of Table 3. In counties with no pre-existing Republican newspaper, Black newspapers are associated with increases in Republican support larger in magnitude than those presented in Table 2. However, Black newspapers seem to be less effective in counties with Republican newspapers: all interaction coefficients are opposite in sign to $\mathbb{1}$[Active Black Newspaper].

We then investigate whether the success of Black newspaper in increasing the vote share for Republican candidates relates to the market size of potential Black readers. We estimate a modified version of Equation 1 within our stacked design:

$$\begin{aligned} Y_{cte} = \alpha + \beta_1 \mathbb{1}[\text{Newspaper Opened}]_{cte} + \beta_2 Z_{cte} \\ + \beta_3 \mathbb{1}[\text{Newspaper Opened}]_{cte} \times Z_{cte} + \gamma_{te} + \tau_{te} + \varepsilon_{cte} \end{aligned} \tag{2}$$

Where Z_{cte} is the standardized Black share of the population of a county or the standardized Black literacy rate of a county.[13] The coefficient of interest, β_3, show the differential electoral response to an active Black newspaper for a county with a one standard deviation higher Black population share or literacy rate.

As shown in Panel B of Table 3, we do not find evidence that Black newspapers were more active in counties with higher Black population shares. Black newspapers increase the Republican vote share by 6.3 percentage points, on average, in counties with the mean Black population share. We also detect a 1.1 p.p. increase in Republican turnout, and an 11.2 p.p. increase in the probability that a Republican candidate wins the county. Interestingly,

[13]We use data from all counties to calculate Z_{cte}, regardless of their presence in the final stacked dataset. We interpolate Black population shares obtained from IPSR 2896 (Haines and ICPSR, 2005), using harmonized county boundaries from Ferrara et al. (2024)

Table 3: Black Newspapers, Market Size and Structure, and Political Participation

	% Republican Vote	Republican Turnout	Non-Republican Turnout	P(Republican Victory)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Panel A: Republican Newspaper Availability				
𝟙[Active Black Newspaper]	2.861**	0.462**	-0.460**	0.050
	(1.137)	(0.226)	(0.216)	(0.031)
𝟙[Active Black Newspaper] × Active Rep. Newspaper	-1.593	-0.159	0.226	-0.029
	(1.109)	(0.220)	(0.211)	(0.030)
Panel B: Black Population Share				
𝟙[Active Black Newspaper]	6.287***	1.169***	0.129	0.112***
	(1.131)	(0.222)	(0.219)	(0.031)
𝟙[Active Black Newspaper] × Std(% Black)	-2.582***	-0.484***	-0.239***	-0.047***
	(0.408)	(0.080)	(0.079)	(0.011)
Panel C: Black Literacy Rate				
𝟙[Active Black Newspaper]	1.650**	0.522***	-0.161	0.080***
	(0.678)	(0.169)	(0.170)	(0.025)
𝟙[Active Black Newspaper] × Std(% Black Lit.)	5.584***	2.346***	1.480***	-0.052
	(1.548)	(0.386)	(0.390)	(0.057)
Observations	3,248	3,248	3,248	3,248

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard errors, clustered at the county-level, in parentheses.

we find that the effectiveness of Black newspapers in mobilizing support for the Republican Party decreases as the Black population share grows. It is important to note, however, that during our period of study most counties with high Black population shares were in the South, where formal and informal efforts to suppress Black political participation were widespread.[14]

In addition to the size of the Black population, the potential market size for Black newspapers in our context also depended on the Black literacy rates, which varied significantly. Our results in Panel C of Table 3 indicate that Black newspapers increased Republican support in counties with higher literacy rate. For counties with the mean Black literacy rates, Black newspapers increased the Republican vote share by 1.65 p.p., Republican turnout by 0.5 p.p., and the probability that the Republican candidate wins the county by 0.8 p.p.. For counties with a one standard deviation higher Black literacy rate, we find that Black newspapers increased the Republican vote share by 5.2 p.p.. We do not detect a change in the probability that the Republican county wins the county, as we find that both Repub-

[14]See Section 5.2 for a more detailed discussion.

lican and non-Republican turnouts increase following the opening of a Black newspaper in counties with higher Black literacy rates.

5.2 Scope for Black Political Participation

We turn to investigate the formal and informal channels of restricting Black political participation during our period of study. The post-Reconstruction period was characterized by the disenfranchisement of Black voters and the rolling back of policies that had advanced the civil rights of the Black population. Those efforts were particularly salient in the South, where legislation was put in place to restrict Black political participation as much as possible (see, for instance, Jones et al. (2012) and the citations within for a nice overview of this literature).

To investigate the interaction of these channels with the emergence of the Black press, we conduct two empirical exercises. First, we collect information on voter suppression legislation from Jones et al. (2017) and interact an indicator variable that equals one if the county has at least one piece of legislation restricting Black political participation with the coefficient on $\mathbb{1}$[Active Black Newspaper]. Examples of such legislation include state-level poll taxes, literacy requirements, and changes to the ballot box system.[15] We choose to not disentangle different types of legislation due to the lack of power. These state-level, franchise-restricting laws were exclusive to southern states.[16] Most of them were adopted between 1890 and 1910, and some were temporarily blocked by the Supreme Court.

Non-formal channels of restricting Black political activity may also have reduced the effect of Black newspapers on Republican support. Efforts to suppress Black political participation were stronger in the south, and so we interact our main coefficient with an indicator variable

[15]During this period, multiple states changed the organization of the elections to restrict Black political participation without changing voting requirement legislation. Examples include the imposition of secret ballots, often without political party identifiers, which *de facto* operated as a literacy test. Other examples include complex multi-ballot boxes elections, in which voters had to fill multiple ballots and a single mistake would invalidate all votes.

[16]States imposing franchise-restricting legislation include Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. See Table 1 of Jones et al. (2017) for further detail.

that equals one if the Black newspaper was active in a former Confederate state. Relative to Panel A, this interaction accounts for time-invariant characteristics of the South that could have hampered Black political activity beyond franchise-restricting laws. It also accounts for the region-wide strong support for the Democratic Party during the region, which could have led to reduced scope for Republican gains in the Region.

Table 4: Black Newspapers, Voting Restrictions, and Political Participation

	% Republican Vote	Republican Turnout	Non-Republican Turnout	P(Republican Victory)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Panel A: Franchise-Restricting Legislation				
𝟙[Active Black Newspaper]	2.523**	0.520***	-0.268	0.045
	(1.013)	(0.201)	(0.191)	(0.029)
𝟙[Active Black Newspaper] × Restriction	-1.889*	-0.411*	-0.184	-0.032***
	(1.074)	(0.213)	(0.203)	(0.030)
Panel B: Confederacy				
𝟙[Active Black Newspaper]	6.681***	2.178***	1.172***	0.081**
	(1.518)	(0.299)	(0.287)	(0.042)
𝟙[Active Black Newspaper] × Confederacy	-5.628***	-2.096***	-1.699***	-0.058
	(1.445)	(0.284)	(0.273)	(0.040)
Observations	3,248	3,248	3,248	3,248

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard errors, clustered at the county-level, in parentheses.

We present results in Table 4. Panel A discusses the results related to voting restrictions. We find that Black newspapers gathered less support for the Republican Party in the presence of franchise-restricting legislation. In counties without such laws, Black newspapers are associated with larger Republican vote shares, higher Republican turnout, and lower non-Republican turnout (p-value=0.16). However, in counties where state laws restricted voting rights, all such Republican gains are nearly erased. We find smaller and statistically insignificant gains in the Republican vote share and Republican turnout, and a robust decrease in the non-Republican turnout.

We observe similar dynamics when the Confederacy fixed effect is included. In Panel B of Table 4 we find large and robust effects of Black newspapers on higher Republican vote shares, higher political participation through Republican and non-Republican turnout,

and the probability that the Republican wins the county. Similarly to Panel A, however, Republican gains following the opening of a Black newspaper are diminished in Confederate states. We still find suggestive evidence that Black newspapers increased Republican support in the South, but the coefficients are smaller and statistically insignificant.

Overall, we find that formal and informal mechanisms of suppressing Black political participation limited the effectiveness of Black newspapers in supporting Republican presidential candidates. The presence of franchise-restricting legislation diminished the impact of Black newspapers on Republican vote shares and turnout. The socio-political environment of the former Confederacy also diminished these effects, reflecting historical regional biases and systemic barriers. The capacity of Black newspapers to shape public opinion and influence electoral outcomes was constrained by these oppressive mechanisms.

6 Ruling out Alternative Explanations

6.1 Political Organization

Perhaps the most plausible threat to our interpretation of the evidence is that Black newspaper openings are part of a broader movement to increase Black political participation. While this would primarily be an error of interpretation, it would nevertheless be helpful to understand whether contemporaneous changes in the economic and social activities of Black people confound our interpretation of the empirical results.

We explore this competing hypothesis by examining the content of local newspapers. We obtain page-level newspaper content data from *Chronicling America*. We start by collecting terms that have a high probability of referring to Black people or activities: negro, colored, or the n-word.[17] We search for these mentions on each of the roughly 20 million pages appearing in the *Chronicling America* database, 1880-1922.[18] Once we identify each keyword mention,

[17]The terms African Americans and Black were not in widespread use during this period.

[18]This period corresponds to when newspaper coverage is relatively dense. Fewer newspapers survived from the mid-nineteenth century and active copyrights prevent the Library of Congress from digitizing more

we then collect every word that is within 10-words of the relevant keyword.

This process yields a collection of words that are likely used when referring to either Black people or subjects and activities connected to Black people, which we clean using the following steps. First, we remove punctuation and numbers. The most common OCR errors are inserted spaces where none exists. To improve the OCR quality, our second step is to concatenate adjacent words if one of those words is not in the English dictionaries but the concatenation is. Third, we reduce words to their roots using Porter stemmer, which combines distinct words such as "house", "houses", and "housed" to the stem "hous." Fourth, to further reduce OCR errors, we drop words that appear fewer than 500 times.

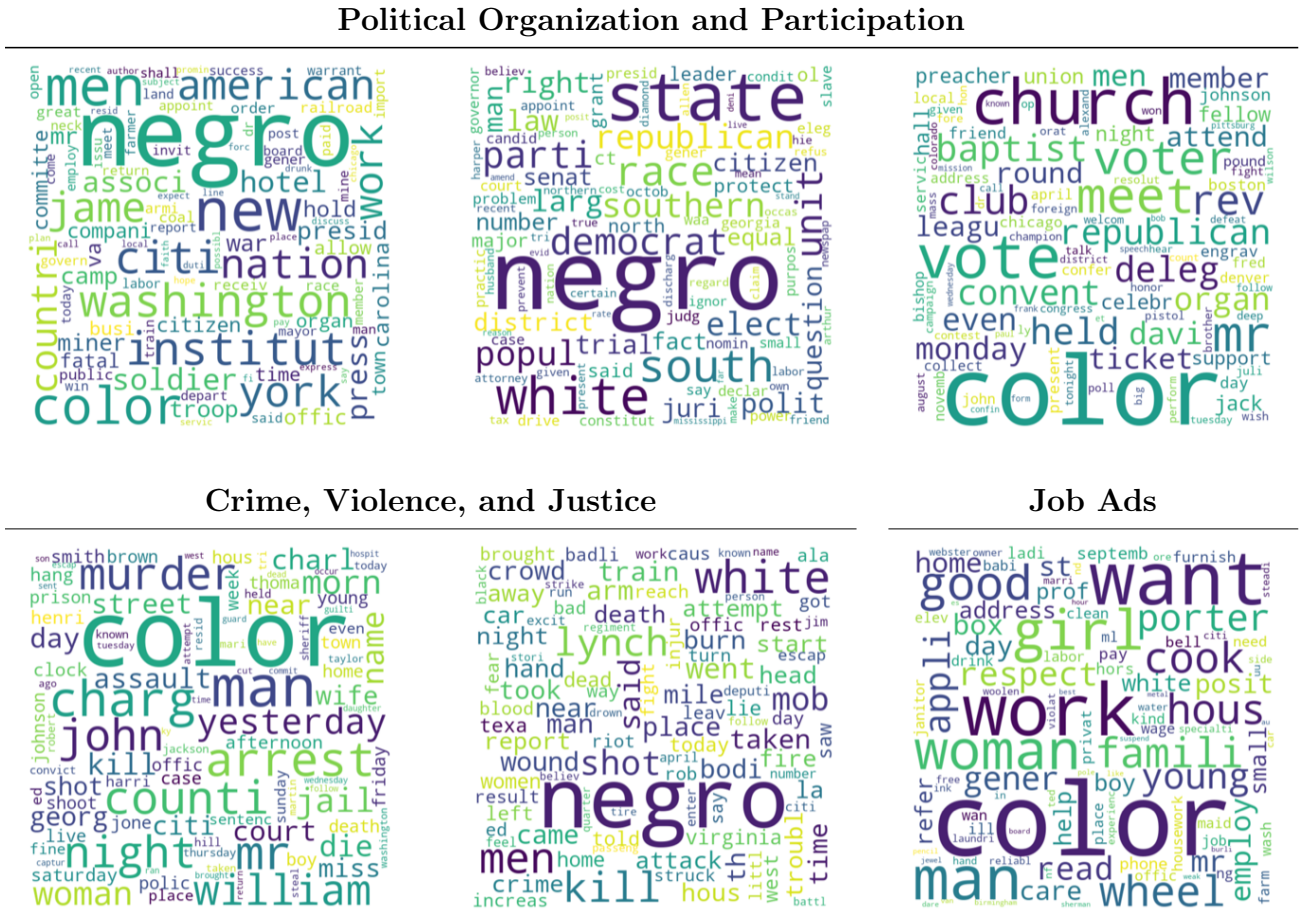
We next identify distinct topics using Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA). LDA is a Bayesian method from computation linguistics. It assumes that each document has a probability distribution over K topics. For each word in the document, first a topic is drawn from that distribution and then a word is drawn from the topic-word probability distribution. The meaning of each topic can be found by looking at words that occur with a high probability in that topic (representative words), words that occur within a topic at a higher probability than other topics (distinctive words), or by closely reading newspaper pages that largely fall into a single topic. LDA is a mixture model, so that newspaper pages can belong to several topics so long as the shares sum to one. We estimate a model with 15 topics. Too few topics risks grouping together distinct subjects, whereas too many topics will result in separate topics that cover similar subjects. Data driven ways for choosing the optimal number of topics do exist, but many researchers suggest picking the value of K that leads to the most human interpretable results.

The model results can be visualized as word clouds. The size of each word is proportional to the topic-word probability, so these are the representative, but not necessarily distinctive words. Of the 15 topics estimated, six are clearly interpretable and relevant for our analysis. These topics, shown in Figure 6, fall into three categories: political organization; crime,

recent newspapers.

violence, and justice; and job ads. The topic modeling also allows disentangling other uses of the tokens. For example, there are clearly topics that refer to fashion and art for when the word "colored" refers to non-race topics. A comprehensive list of topics generated by the language model can be found in Appendix Figure A3.

Figure 6: LDA Categorization of Newspaper Coverage



Content obtained from the *Chronicling America* newspaper database. Categorizations from Latent Dirichlet Allocation.

Now that we have identified relevant topics, we construct our primary outcome variable as the share of pages that mention each topic. Since LDA is a mixture model, each bag of words receives a probability that it corresponds to each of the 15 topics. In practice, the distribution is often bimodal, with one topic receiving a high probability and the remaining topics receiving probabilities that are effectively zero. Aggregating the probabilities thus

yields an estimate for the number of pages that contain a mention of a specific topic.

We now estimate changes in newspaper coverage following the opening of a Black newspaper. Our analysis deviates from Equation 1 in the following ways. First, instead of looking at election years, we now examine newspaper content for each year in the 4 years prior to and 2 years after the Black newspaper opens. We also include newspaper fixed effects to account for time-invariant differences in circulation and format. Importantly, our treatment and control definitions are exactly the same.

Table 5 displays our main results. The results suggest a statistically insignificant decline in coverage of Black people and political organization or participation following the opening of a Black newspaper and a statistically significant increase in coverage of topics relating to violence, crime, and justice. These effects are on the order of 2-5 percent relative to the sample mean. For job ads, we see a suggestive although statistically insignificant increase.

Table 5: Changing Coverage of Black People by Topic after the Opening of a Black Newspaper

	Political Org. / Part. (1)	Violence, Crime, and Justice (2)	Job Ads (3)
$\mathbb{1}$[Active Black Newspaper]	-0.225	0.563**	0.067
	(0.194)	(0.223)	(0.047)
Mean of Dep. Var	7.87	9.54	1.50
Observations	5,454	5,454	5,454

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard errors, clustered at the county-level, in parentheses. Sample is restricted to content in white newspapers. All regressions include newspaper fixed effects.

These results are inconsistent with the idea that Black newspaper openings were part of a broader movement to increase Black political participation. If anything, existing efforts related to political organization appear are declining or at least becoming less newsworthy. The increase in articles relating to violence is relevant for how we interpret our results, as scholarship by Jones et al. (2017) and Williams (2022) has helped establish that racial

violence decreases political participation. Together, these results tell us that our earlier analysis is more likely to be *underestimating* the influence of Black newspapers on political participation.

6.2 Republican Support in the Media

Another potential threat to our results is the possibility that Black newspapers are part of a wider movement of increasing Republican support in newspapers. We point to several pieces of evidence to argue that it is not the case. Table 1 shows that counties treated earlier were not increasing their Republican vote share differentially from counties treated later. This evidence is supported by our event studies in Figure 5, which show parallel pre-trends between treated and control counties.

To support this point, we test whether the opening of Black newspapers changed the partisan leanings of other newspapers in the same location. We repeat the analysis from Section 6.1, which uses yearly content data from newspapers in counties with Black newspaper openings. The sample is restricted to non-Black newspapers that were active before and after the introduction of a Black newspaper. To measure newspaper partisan leaning, we use partisan phrases obtained from Gentzkow et al. (2019) as discussed in Section 3. If the timing of Black newspaper openings is associated with increasing Republican support in newspapers, the usage of Republican phrasing should increase differentially in newspapers in treated counties. Therefore, we test whether Black newspaper openings induced changes in usage of Republican phrases, Democratic phrases, and the percentage of political phrases that are Republican.

Table 6: Changes in Partisan Language Following Black Newspaper Opening

	Rep. Phrases/ Page	Dem. Phrases/ Page	% Republican Phrases
	(1)	(2)	(3)
𝟙[Active Black Newspaper]	-0.010**	-0.007	0.000
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.020)
N	2,237	2,237	1,873
Mean	0.065	0.053	0.570

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard errors, clustered at the county-level, in parentheses. Sample is restricted to content in white newspapers. All regressions include newspaper fixed effects.

We present results in Table 6. We find that, following the opening of a Black newspaper, newspapers in the same county reduce their usage of partisan language, reflecting the pattern observed in Figure 3. This decrease is similar across Republican and Democratic phrases: the coefficient on the effect of Black newspapers on the share of political phrases that are Republican in other newspapers is tightly centered around zero. We are able to reject increases in the share of Republican phrases greater than 3.9 p.p., equivalent to 6.8% of the mean.

In summary, our findings pointing to increased Republican support following Black newspaper openings cannot be explained by underlying efforts to increase Black political participation or by changes to the local supply of partisan news. Thus, we argue that the increase in support to Republican presidential candidates is directly associated to Black newspapers, who were political in nature and Republican in form.

7 Conclusion

We study the effects of Black newspapers on political participation during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Historical accounts of the Black press often state their objective in unifying the Black community and advancing its interests through the shaping of public

opinion. Many of these conclusions are drawn from a relatively small and somewhat selected set of newspapers, publishers, and journalists. We study a comprehensive set of newspaper openings and in a framework that attempts to break the link between potential confounding effects (e.g., changes in the economic of social standing of Black people).

First, we analyze the content of 20 million newspaper pages to show that Black newspapers were more political and more supportive of the Republican Party. We proceed to show the effects of Black newspapers on county-level political participation in Presidential elections. We compare counties that receive a Black newspaper just before instead of just after a Presidential election. Results from this stacked difference-in-difference framework point to an increase the Republican vote share following the Black newspaper opening relative to otherwise similar counties. We do not observe changes in overall turnout, and so it seems like the effect is driven by shifting preferences and not by increased overall political participation. Further, we show that while formal and informal barriers to Black political participation were significant deterrents, Black newspapers were still effective in mobilizing Republican support.

These results emphasize the importance of the Black press in shaping American politics, which remains understudied in the social science scholarship. By showing that Black newspapers affected electoral outcomes in a period of heightened racial tensions and increasing voter suppression, we provide some evidence that the Black press may have been successful in some of its main goals since its inception: unifying the Black community and shaping public opinion on issues that are important to Black people.

References

Albright, Alex, Jeremy A Cook, James J Feigenbaum, Laura Kincaide, Jason Long, and Nathan Nunn (2021) "After the burning: The economic effects of the 1921 Tulsa race massacre,"Technical report, National Bureau of Economic Research.

Beach, Brian and W Walker Hanlon (2023) "Culture and the historical fertility transition," *The Review of Economic Studies*, 90 (4), 1669–1700.

Beatty, Bess (1980) "Black Newspapers: Neglected Source for the "New South"," *Negro History Bulletin*, 43 (3), 60–63, https://www.jstor.org/stable/44176988.

Bird, Steven, Ewan Klein, and Edward Loper (2009) *Natural language processing with Python: analyzing text with the natural language toolkit*: " O'Reilly Media, Inc.".

Brown, Warren Henry (1946) *A Checklist of Negro Newspapers in the United States (1827-1946).*: Lincoln Univ., School of Journalism, Google-Books-ID: 9E9avgEACAAJ.

Bullock, Penelope L. (1981) *The Afro-American periodical press, 1838-1909*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

Cascio, Elizabeth U and Ebonya Washington (2014) "Valuing the vote: The redistribution of voting rights and state funds following the voting rights act of 1965," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 129 (1), 379–433.

Cook, Lisa D, Maggie E C Jones, Trevon D Logan, and David Rosé (2022) "The Evolution of Access to Public Accommodations in the United States," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 138 (1), 37–102, 10.1093/qje/qjac035.

——— (2023) "Black-Friendly Businesses in Cities During the Civil Rights Era," Unpublished Manuscript.

Ferrara, Andreas, Patrick A. Testa, and Liyang Zhou (2024) "New area- and population-based geographic crosswalks for U.S. counties and congressional districts, 1790–2020," *Historical Methods: A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History*, 0 (0), 1–13, 10.1080/01615440.2024.2369230, Publisher: Routledge.

Gentzkow, Matthew and Jesse M. Shapiro (2010) "What Drives Media Slant? Evidence From U.S. Daily Newspapers," *Econometrica*, 78 (1), 35–71, 10.3982/ECTA7195.

Gentzkow, Matthew, Jesse M. Shapiro, and Michael Sinkinson (2011a) "United States Newspaper Panel, 1869-2004: Version 6," 10.3886/ICPSR30261.V6.

——— (2011b) "The Effect of Newspaper Entry and Exit on Electoral Politics," *American Economic Review*, 101 (7), 2980–3018, 10.1257/aer.101.7.2980.

——— (2014) "Competition and Ideological Diversity: Historical Evidence from US Newspapers," *American Economic Review*, 104 (10), 3073–3114, 10.1257/aer.104.10.3073.

Gentzkow, Matthew, Jesse M Shapiro, and Matt Taddy (2019) "Measuring group differences in high-dimensional choices: method and application to congressional speech," *Econometrica*, 87 (4), 1307–1340.

Haines, Michael R. and ICPSR (2005) "Historical, Demographic, Economic, and Social Data: The United States, 1790-2002: Version 3," 10.3886/ICPSR02896.V3.

Heersink, Boris and Jeffery A. Jenkins (2020) *Republican Party Politics and the American South, 1865–1968*: Cambridge University Press, Google-Books-ID: l8fVDwAAQBAJ.

Henritze, Barbara K. (1995) *Bibliographic Checklist of African American Newspapers*, Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Pub. Co.

Hume, Richard L. and Jerry B. Gough (2008) *Blacks, Carpetbaggers, and Scalawags: The Constitutional Conventions of Radical Reconstruction*: LSU Press, Google-Books-ID: 8WnPeySUKEIC.

Jones, Daniel B., Werner Troesken, and Randall Walsh (2012) "A Poll Tax by any Other Name: The Political Economy of Disenfranchisement," (18612), 10.3386/w18612, DOI: 10.3386/w18612.

Jones, Daniel B, Werner Troesken, and Randall Walsh (2017) "Political participation in a violent society: The impact of lynching on voter turnout in the post-Reconstruction South," *Journal of Development Economics*, 129, 29–46.

Key, Valdimer Orlando (1949) "Southern politics in state and nation," *(No Title)*.

Kousser, J Morgan (1974) *The shaping of southern politics: Suffrage restriction and the establishment of the one-party south, 1880-1910*: Yale University Press.

Logan, Trevon D. (2020) "Do Black Politicians Matter? Evidence from Reconstruction," *The Journal of Economic History*, 80 (1), 1–37, 10.1017/S0022050719000755.

Margo, Robert A (1990) *Race and schooling in the South, 1880-1950: An economic history*: University of Chicago Press.

Mullen, Lincoln A. and Jordan Bratt (2018) "USAboundaries: Historical and Contemporary Boundaries of the United States of America," *Journal of Open Source Software*, 3, 314, 10.21105/joss.00314.

Naidu, Suresh (2012) "Suffrage, schooling, and sorting in the post-bellum US South,"Technical report, National Bureau of Economic Research.

Ottinger, Sebastian and Max Posch (2024) "The political economy of propaganda: evidence from US newspapers."

Penn, Irvine Garland (1891) *The Afro-American Press and Its Editors* (210): Willey & Company.

Petrova, Maria (2011) "Newspapers and Parties: How Advertising Revenues Created an Independent Press," *American Political Science Review*, 105 (4), 790–808, 10.1017/S0003055411000360.

Pride, Armistead Scott and Clint C. Wilson (1997) *A history of the Black press*, Moorland-Spingarn series, Washington, D.C: Howard University Press.

Rambachan, Ashesh and Jonathan Roth (2023) "A More Credible Approach to Parallel Trends," *The Review of Economic Studies*, 90 (5), 2555–2591, 10.1093/restud/rdad018.

Simmons, Charles A (2006) *The African American press: a history of news coverage during national crises, with special reference to four black newspapers, 1827-1965*: McFarland.

Snorgrass, William J (1986) "The Black Press and Political Alliances: The Turning Point, 1928," *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, 10 (3), https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/black-press-political-alliances-turning-point/docview/1311805108/se-2.

Southern Poverty Law Center (2024) "Whose Heritage? Database," https://www.splcenter.org/20190201/whose-heritage-public-symbols-confederacy.

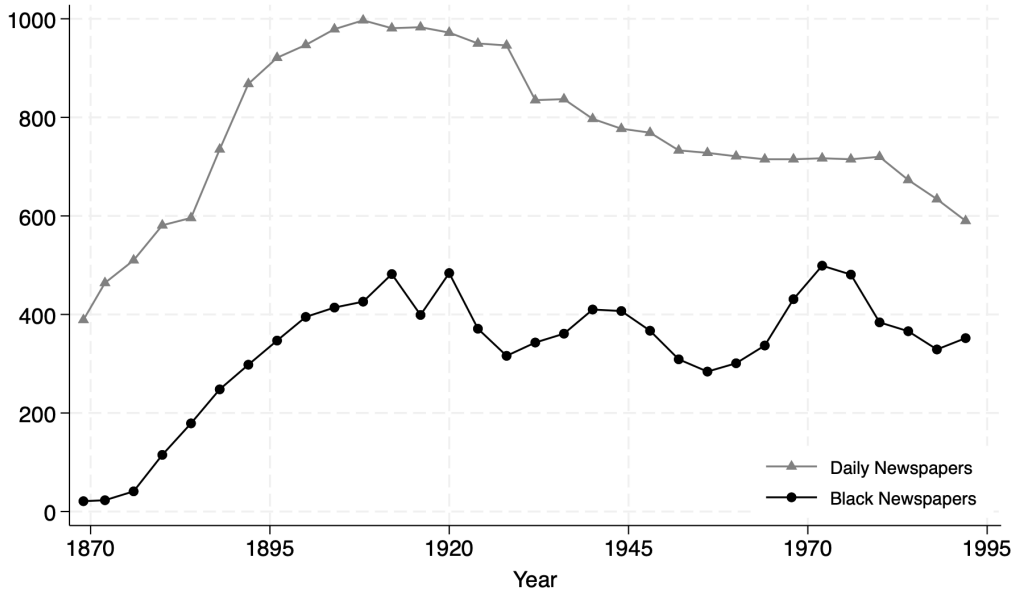
Wang, Tianyi (Forthcoming) "The electric telegraph, news coverage and political participation," *The Journal of Economic History*.

Williams, Jhacova (2022) "Historical lynchings and the contemporary voting behavior of Blacks," *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 14 (3), 224–253.

A Appendix

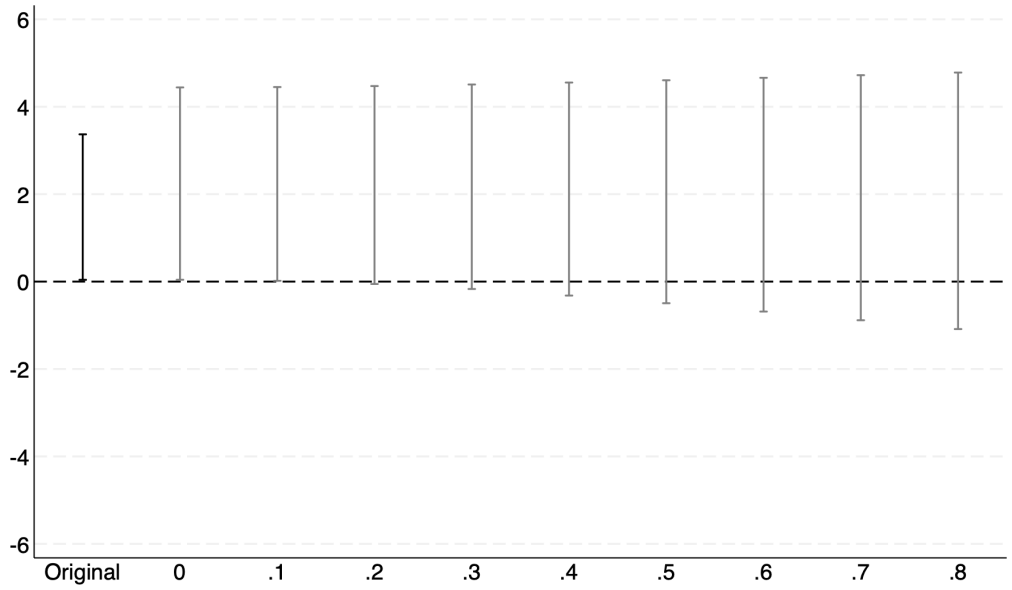
Figures

Figure A1: Time series of active daily newspapers and Black newspapers



Data for daily newspapers comes from Gentzkow et al. (2011b). Data for Black newspapers comes from Henritze (1995).

Figure A2: Coefficients from Figure 5a under different violations of parallel trends.



Coefficients and confidence intervals built following Rambachan and Roth (2023). 90% Confidence intervals are shown.

Figure A3: Full LDA Categorization of Newspaper Coverage

Political Organization and Participation

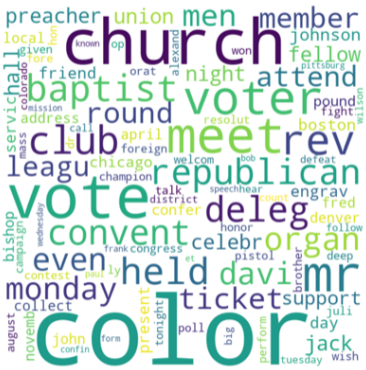
Topic 7



Topic 10



Topic 13

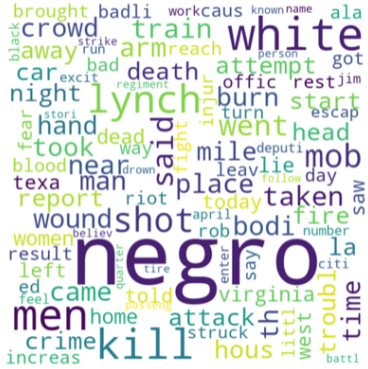


Crime, Violence, and Justice

Topic 9



Topic 11



Job Ads

Topic 6



Clothing and Home Decor

Topic 5



Topic 12



Unclear

Topic 15



Unclear Topics [Continued]

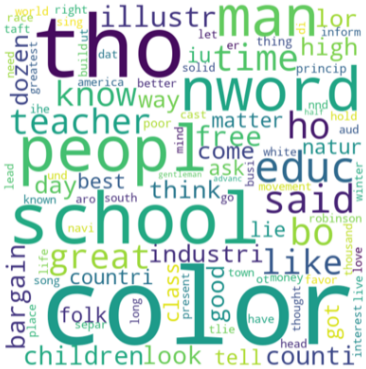
Topic 1



Topic 2



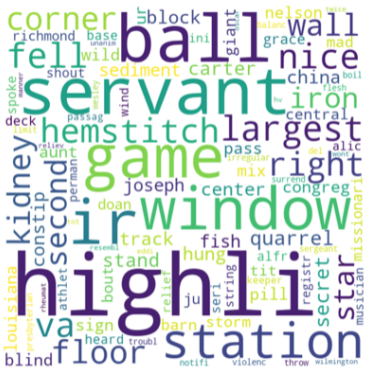
Topic 3



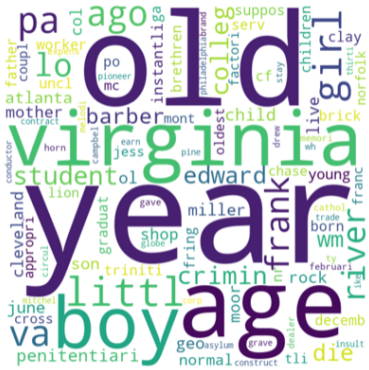
Topic 4



Topic 8



Topic 14



Content taken *Chronicling America* newspaper database. Categorizations from Latent Dirichlet Allocation.

Tables

Table A1: Share of Pages Mentioning Politics

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Black Newspaper	0.074***	0.078***	0.092**
	(0.023)	(0.025)	(0.045)
Daily Newspaper		0.039**	0.051**
		(0.017)	(0.026)
Observations	22,250	22,250	22,250
County FE			Y
Year FE			Y

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard errors, clustered at the county-level, in parentheses.

Table A2: % of partisan phrases that are Republican

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Black Newspaper	0.031**	0.028*	0.049
	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.036)
Daily Newspaper		-0.008	-0.022
		(0.012)	(0.029)
Observations	2,063	2,063	2,052
County FE			Y
Year FE			Y

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard errors, clustered at the county-level, in parentheses.

Table A3: Black Newspapers and Electoral Outcomes - Region × Year × Stack Fixed Effects

	% Republican Vote	Republican Turnout	Non-Republican Turnout	Pr(Republican Victory)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
𝟙[Active Black Newspaper]	2.845**	0.565**	-0.279	0.045*
	(1.241)	(0.260)	(0.238)	(0.025)
Observations	3,252	3,252	3,252	3,252
Mean of Dep. Var.	35.27	6.44	9.16	0.30

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard errors, clustered at the county-level, in parentheses.

Table A4: Stems most associated with newspaper race

Black stems		Black stems (continued)		White stems	
Stem	Category	Stem	Category	Stem	Category
primari	Election	yorkvil	Geographic	box	
avenu		leet		leas	
seattl	Geographic	asst		wire	
color	Race	sperri		omaha	Geographic
negro	Race	attest		page	
taft	Election	tallahasse	Geographic	phoenix	Geographic
miss	Geographic	chapel		utah	Geographic
carolina	Geographic	hotchkiss		divis	
son		supervisor		journal	
white	Race	bolivar		lake	Geographic
true		greenwood	Geographic	tbo	
colleg	Education/Election	gibson		nebraska	Geographic
rev		afroamerican	Race	delawar	Geographic
hon		eugen	Geographic	salt	Geographic
connecticut	Geographic	baptist		wilmington	Geographic
voter	Election	mclaurin			
mississippi	Geographic	charleston	Geographic		
race	Race	orangeburg	Geographic		
herebi		attwat			
southern	Geographic	frost			
abbevil		couch			
welch		bridgeport	Geographic		
cotton		orang			
kentucki	Geographic	leon			
florida	Geographic	paxton			
hartford	Geographic	jal			
columbia	Geographic	thomson			
ass		redfield	Geographic		
ave		sheldon			
fuller		aiken			
yale	Education	blake			
trowbridg		stoddard			
mason		finley			
bristol	Geographic	rudi			
greenvil	Geographic	mellen			
ky	Geographic	berea	Geographic		
dewel	Geographic	natchez	Geographic		
wilbur		booker			
tillman	Election	woolsey			
catalogu		horatio			
paducah		investor			
hadley		meriden			
barn					

Notes: The data come from the Chronicling America newspaper pages published between 1880 and 1925. Stop words are dropped. We apply the Porter stemmer to the remaining words. Rare stems that appear fewer than 1,000 or common stems that appear more than 100,000 times are then dropped. The table displays the stems with the 100 largest χ^2 statistics, testing whether Black owned and white owned newspapers use those stems with the same frequency. Stems with the highest overrepresentation appear higher in the table.