

Covert Cross-Racial Mobilization, Black Activism, and Political Participation Pre-Voting Rights Act

by Loren Collingwood and Benjamin Gonzalez-O'Brien

Between 1944 and 1965, the southern Black vote steadily grew in size and relevance. Yet little research has sought to untangle the ways in which southern White candidates mobilized these voters, and whether southern Whites played any role in advancing Black political participation prior to the Voting Rights Act. This paper examines the impact of cross-racial mobilization on African American political participation in the context of 1950s Florida and the covert means by which candidates courted the Black vote in the pre-Voting Rights Act (VRA) period. We define cross-racial mobilization (CRM) as conscious race-targeted mobilization of blocs of voters of one racial group by politicians and campaign operatives of another racial group. However, we maintain that during the pre-VRA period cross-racial mobilization was often done in an indirect fashion in the South to avoid the alienation of White

Loren Collingwood is an Associate Professor in Political Science at the University of California, Riverside. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Washington in 2012. He is the co-author of 22 articles and seven forthcoming articles. He is the author of *Campaigning in a Racially Diversifying America: When and How Cross-Racial Electoral Mobilization Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming November 2019) and is co-author with Benjamin Gonzalez-O'Brien, *Sanctuaries: The Politics of Refuge* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming August 2019). Benjamin Gonzalez O'Brien earned his Ph.D. in Political Science at the University of Washington in 2014. He is an Assistant Professor in Political Science at San Diego State University. He is the author of *Handcuffs and Chin Link: Criminalizing the Undocumented in America* (Richmond: University of Virginia Press, 2018) and co-author with Loren Collingwood, *Sanctuaries: The Politics of Refuge* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming August 2019).

voters who still dominated the electorate. We define this form of indirect mobilization as covert cross-racial mobilization (CCRM). Candidates engaged in CCRM through three different channels: by providing monetary support to labor and other groups who would in turn mobilize the Black vote, by giving speeches in Black churches, and through communication with the Black community via African-American radio and newspapers.

Traditional models of Black political behavior during the Civil Rights era do not incorporate cross-racial mobilization; rather they tend to highlight a few broad factors in explaining African American participation in the South. First, prior to the implementation of the VRA, Blacks who lived in places that were especially racially hostile (i.e., the Black belt) tended to be registered at lower levels relative to their counterparts in less racially hostile counties.¹ Second, institutional barriers, such as the White primary, poll taxes, and literacy tests, tended to retard Black registration.² Third, Blacks who lived in places with strong social organizations (e.g., Black churches, large NAACP memberships), and higher socioeconomic status tended to have greater resources resulting in higher rates of registration.³ A fourth, more elusive variable, which has received but passing attention⁴ is the electoral mobilization of Black voters by White candidates and White interest groups (i.e., cross-racial mobilization). This paper delves into this fourth vari-

-
- 1 William A. Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest* (Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press, 1975); V.O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949); Richard M. Valelly, *The Two Reconstructions: The Struggle for Black Enfranchisement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Wayne A. Santoro, "The Civil Rights Movement and the Right to Vote: Black Protest, Segregationist Violence and the Audience," *Social Forces* 86, no. 4 (June 2008): 1391-1414.
 - 2 Donald R. Matthews and James W. Prothro, "Political Factors and Negro Voter Registration in the South," *American Political Science Review* 57, no. 2 (June 1963): 355-367; Matthews and Prothro, "Social and Economic Factors and Negro Voter Registration in the South," *American Political Science Review* 47, no. 1 (1963): 24-44; Robert W. Mickey, "The Beginning of the End for Authoritarian Rule in America: *Smith v. Allwright* and the Abolition of the White Primary in the Deep South," *Studies in American Political Development* 22, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 143-182; David C. Colby, "The Voting Rights Act and Black Registration in Mississippi," *Publius* 16, no. 4 (Autumn 1986): 123-137.
 - 3 Donald R. Matthews and James W. Prothro, *Negroes and the New Southern Politics* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc., 1966); Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
 - 4 Alfred B. Clubok, John M. De Grove, and Charles D. Farris, "The Manipulated Negro Vote: Some pre-Conditions and Consequences," *Journal of Politics* 26, no. 1 (February 1964): 112-129; Matthews and Prothro, "Political Factors and Negro Voter Registration in the South."

able. We proffer a framework for the analysis of covert cross-racial mobilization across the South by looking at one specific Senate race in Florida and the strategies employed by candidates to mobilize African-Americans ahead of the election. The introduction of covert cross-racial mobilization as a variable in Black political participation in the period following the *Smith v. Allwright* decision allows a more nuanced analysis both of what led to increases in Black voter participation in the pre-VRA South and the strategies developed by candidates when Black voters became a potentially valuable bloc in Southern politics.

To assess our theoretical framework, we employ a mixed-method design. We use archival data and secondary sources to unmask each candidate's cross-racial mobilization strategy vis-à-vis African American voters in an extremely high-profile U.S. Senate race in 1950s Florida. One candidate, Claude Pepper, quietly worked with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) to financially and organizationally support Black registration drives in four counties across the state.⁵ As such, the numerical growth in Black participation leading up to the election in these counties was significantly greater than other localities across the state. We suggest and show that covert cross-racial mobilization is an important variable in explaining variation in Black political participation prior to the massive social and racial upheaval of the mid-1960s. While previous research has hinted at the relevancy of this variable,⁶ scholarship has not included covert cross-racial mobilization in models of Black participation, perhaps because of the difficulty of measurement.

We analyze Black political participation in Florida for two reasons. First, Florida has unique demographic and sectional variation, where on the one hand some counties exhibit historical trends similar to the old South while other counties demonstrate much different patterns.⁷ In other words, Whites in some parts of the state—namely in the North—share similar racial views as Whites in Georgia, Alabama, and other Deep South states. But the racial views of Whites in other parts of the state—notably South Florida—reflect a more racially moderate temperament as Whites in the North. This attitudinal cleavage should theoretically lead to

5 The Pepper campaign tried to keep this cross-racial mobilization quiet, but eventually his opponent discovered the machinations and exploited it to his advantage.

6 Matthews and Prothro, "Political Factors and Negro Voter Registration in the South"; Matthews and Prothro, *Negroes and the New Southern Politics*.

7 Clubok, Grove, and Farris, "The Manipulated Negro Vote."

variation in outcomes of minority political incorporation, so county level analysis can be conducted. In other states, such as Mississippi or Alabama, White intimidation and repression was so suffocating that Black political incorporation (registration) by 1950 was essentially null. Second, and more practically, Florida is one of the only southern states that collected concrete voter registration data by race in 1950. This analysis is simply not possible in most southern states prior to 1960.

In the next section we summarize the history of Black voting rights in the period preceding passage of the Voting Rights Act before reviewing the literature on Black political participation in the South and specifically Florida during this period. Next, we lay out our covert cross-racial mobilization framework followed by a review of the racial tactics used in the 1950 Senate Democratic primary race between Claude Pepper and George Smathers. Here, we present evidence indicating that Pepper engaged in various covert cross-racial mobilization tactics, including supporting a CIO Black registration drive; whereas Smathers attempted to suppress the Black vote and used race as a wedge issue. We next present our empirical findings, which support our qualitative account and interpretation. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of the implications of this research and the need to expand our analysis to more states and a broader time period.

The Historical Setting

In this section, we briefly discuss the events leading up to the *Smith v. Allwright* decision, and why this decision had such an impact on cross-racial mobilization.⁸ Drawing on this discussion, we pose some questions regarding how *Smith* may have affected Black participation in the South.

With the end of the Civil War, and the enactment of the 14th and 15th Amendments, Blacks were technically given the right to vote. And indeed, across the South during the Reconstruction Era, Blacks did enjoy some voting rights.⁹ But by the late 1890s, Southern

8 For a more detailed analysis of the events leading up to *Smith*, see Darlene Hine, *Black Victory: The Rise and Fall of the White Primary in Texas* (Millwood, NY: KTO Press, 1979); Charles L. Zelden, *The Battle for the Black Ballot: Smith v. Allwright and the Defeat of the Texas All-White Primary* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004); or Mickey, "The Beginning of the End of Authoritarian Rule in America."

9 Richard G. Smolka, review of *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910*, by Morgan J. Kousser, *History: Reviews of New Books*, 3, no. 4 (1975): 90.

Democrats regained control of all aspects of government in the South and systematically disfranchised Black voters.¹⁰ Using the Jim Crow tactics of poll taxes, intimidation and physical violence, and notably the All White Democratic Primary, Blacks were excluded from influencing politics across the Southern states. But tensions between the races grew on the eve of *Smith*, as World War II catalyzed changes to the racial status quo.¹¹ As some have argued, prior to *Smith*, tensions between whites and blacks sometimes exploded in racial violence, resulting in increases in White threat of Black violence. While the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and other legal and activist organizations had long been fighting for Black voting rights, it was not until the *Smith V. Allwright* Supreme Court decision in 1944 that the All White Primary was ultimately abolished and the White authoritarian hold on politics began to unravel.

While White politicians generally maintained their stranglehold on power relations in Florida, the inexorable tide of Black participation moved at a quick pace. With the exception of Georgia, which had a concentration of Black political power in Atlanta, Texas, where the end of the All White Primary obviously had the most immediate impact (since the case originated in Texas), and Louisiana, where the Long faction tended to involve more poor Blacks in politics,¹² increases in registration and raw figures in Florida place it near the top of Southern states for Black registration. Registration figures are presented in Table 1, which is sorted by raw growth.

The *Smith V. Allwright* decision was a watershed moment in voting rights that is often overlooked as the beginning of the end of Southern racial segregation and Table 1 clearly shows black voter registration improving across the South but noticeably in Florida. This is because, in part, the time period is conflated with the return of Black soldiers from World War II.¹³ (Parker, 2010). While WWII certainly had a massive structural impact, we are specifically concerned

10 Ibid.

11 Michael J. Klarman, "How Brown Changed Race Relations: The Backlash Thesis," *Journal of American History* 81, no. 1 (June 1994): 81-118; Christopher S. Parker, "When Politics Becomes Protest: Black Veterans and Political Activism in the Postwar South," *Journal of Politics* 71, no. 1 (January 2009): 113-131.

12 V. O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: AA. Knopf, 1949); M.L. Kurtz and M.D. Peoples, *Earl K. Long: The saga of uncle Earl and Louisiana politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992).

13 Parker, "When Politics Becomes Protest."

Table 1. Increase in Black registration post *Smith v. Allwright*, Southern States.

State	1947	1952	Growth	Percent Growth
Louisiana	10,000	120,000	110,000	1100
Texas	100,000	181,916	81,916	82
Florida	49,000	120,900	71,900	147
South Carolina	50,000	80,000	30,000	60
North Carolina	75,000	100,000	25,000	33
Virginia	48,000	69,326	21,326	44
Alabama	6,000	25,224	19,224	320
Georgia	125,000	144,835	19,835	16
Mississippi	5,000	20,000	15,000	300
Arkansas	47,000	61,413	14,413	31
Tennessee	80,000	85,000	5,000	6
Totals	595,000	1,008,614	413,614	70

Source: Lawson, *Black Ballots*.¹⁴

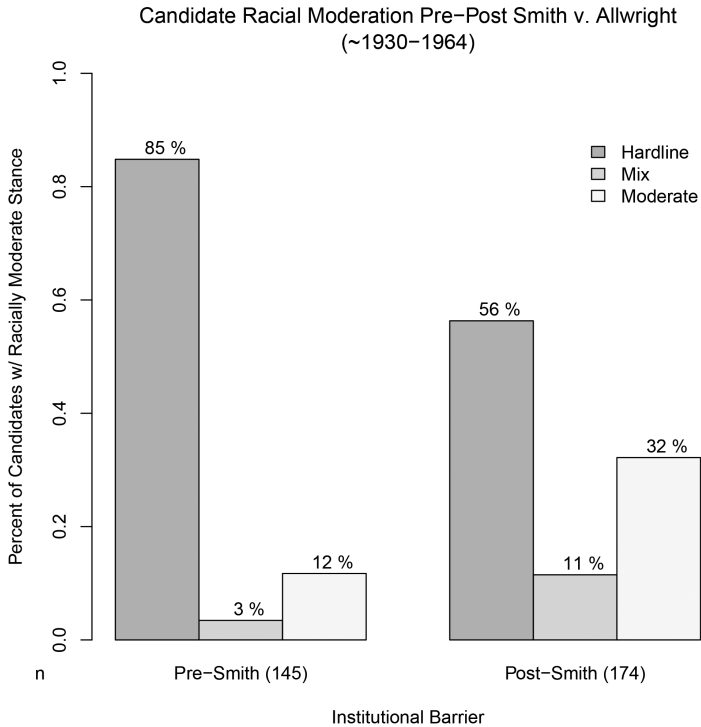
with how the reduction in electoral barriers increased the chances of political participation among Blacks. By most accounts, scholars have shown that intense massive White resistance did not set in until after the *Brown V. Board* decision in 1954,¹⁵ so in the years immediately following *Smith*, some candidates did tread tepidly towards Black incorporation, as was the case with Claude Pepper of Florida.

Indeed, as Klarman claims, “the pattern of response to *Brown* was consistent: Race became the decisive focus of southern politics, and massive resistance its dominant theme.”¹⁶ In his extensive review of Florida politics, Price argues that prior to the desegregation of public schools, the effect of race on the voting behavior of Whites in the South, and Florida in particular, was relatively soft

14 S.F. Lawson, *Black ballots: voting rights in the South, 1944-1969* (New York: Lexington Books, 1976).

15 Neil R. McMillen, *The Citizen's Council* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Francis M. Wilhoit, *The Politics of Massive Resistance* (New York: G. Braziller, 1973); Clive Webb, *Massive Resistance: Southern Opposition to the Second Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

16 Klarman, “How *Brown* Changed Race Relations,” 97.



Cross-Racial Mobilization Pre-Post *Smith v. Allwright* shows that candidates were much more likely to pitch themselves as moderates once the All White Primary was eliminated. Source: Collingwood (2019).¹⁷

compared to later years of massive White resistance.¹⁸ The *Smith v. Allwright* decision made Blacks in the South a potentially valuable voting bloc in close elections if they could be mobilized covertly. While Democratic politicians had to be careful in how Blacks were courted (i.e., they had to be covert), after *Smith v. Allwright* it became clear that many White Southern Democratic politicians were interested in capturing the growing Black vote.

In the wake of the *Smith v. Allwright* decision, some Southern candidates began adopting a more moderate image on race, as

17 Loren Collingwood, *Campaigning in a Racially Diversifying America: When and How Cross-Racial Electoral Mobilization Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

18 Hugh Douglas Price, "The Negro and Florida Politics, 1944-1954," *Journal of Politics* 17, no. 2 (May 1955): 198-220.

reflected in Figure 2 above. While events leading up to and after *Smith* have been well documented as leading to Black insurgency, the research linking specific variables to increases in Black participation is sparse. We argue that covert cross-racial mobilization played a role in the increases in Black participation across the South and that the *Smith* decision had a significant impact on the strategies employed by White politicians in the South. We do not presume that our analysis is the first to uncover cross-racial mobilization in the South, as this has been documented to varying degrees across a wide time period. Yet none of this research has directly tied cross-racial mobilization—covert or otherwise—to Black participation. We argue that this is potentially an overlooked measure that should be included in further analyses, and we demonstrate ways in which this can be done. Before doing so, however, we point to three bits of literature that are especially relevant to the study of African American political participation and political participation in Florida, which we review below.

Black Political Participation in Florida and Across the South

While it is unclear whether their sample is at all representative, Clubok et al. lay out the many ways in which candidates and public officials corral the Black vote by investigating cross-racial mobilization in six towns across Florida during the 1950s-1960s. They find cross-racial mobilization rampant in local politics: “In five of the six towns...Negro registration and voting was or had been encouraged, facilitated, and, to varying degrees, organized by members of the White political structure.”¹⁹ However, Clubok and colleagues do not systematically examine the relationship between White cross-racial mobilization targeted at Black voters and variation in Black political participation. Their findings, while instructive, are largely qualitative and not specific to Black participation. Moreover, they do not assess the covert nature of the political mobilization/outreach.

In his investigation of Florida politics post *Smith V. Allwright*, Hugh Price shows that it was a fairly common strategy for [White] Florida candidates to mobilize African Americans. Regarding the 1950 Florida Senate Democratic primary—the same election we analyze—Price states: “The Negro vote is too large for conservative candidates to risk indulging in undiluted Negro-baiting, but neither do liberal candidates dare expose a too pro-Negro program

19 Clubok, De Grove, and Farris, “The Manipulated Negro Vote,” 117.

or make too open a bid for Negro support.”²⁰ Without providing in-depth evidence, Price seems to suggest that candidates were engaging in covert cross-racial mobilization designed to increase their support among Florida Blacks. Nonetheless, Price does not examine the strategies employed by candidates to increase Black political participation, nor the predictors of Black participation in a multi-variate context.

Historian James Clark finds more in-depth evidence of the candidates’ racial strategies: the *New York Times* notes that both candidates “are courting the Negro vote as much as they can without offending White voters.”²¹ Clark further details the CIO registration campaign, noting that there was a “CIO report entitled ‘Survey of Negro Vote in Florida’ showing that labor organizers were working to register Black voters in Florida for Pepper.”²² He continues: “The registration effort...did produce greater numbers of Black voters in Jacksonville, Miami, and Tampa.”²³ This evidence certainly suggests that Pepper was engaged in at least some form of cross-racial mobilization, even if indirectly via the CIO, but Clark does not provide close county-by-county details or linkages between covert cross-racial mobilization and Black participation. Our analysis, however, builds off Clark’s work. The next section develops a covert cross-racial mobilization theoretical framework, then traces the contours of the 1950 U.S. Senate campaign between Claude Pepper and George Smathers. Using archival evidence, we show that Pepper supported a CIO Black registration campaign, whereas Smathers conducted a largely anti-Black campaign in his attempt to win moderate to conservative White votes worried about the specter of Black political participation.

Of course, covert cross-racial mobilization alone does not explain increases in Black participation in the post-*Smith v. Allwright* period. Matthews and Prothro wrote two articles in 1963 examining county-level Black voter registration across the South.²⁴ Using data mostly from the late 1950s and early 1960s, these scholars find that both socio-economic and political variables contrib-

20 Price, “The Negro and Florida Politics, 1944-1954,” 217.

21 *New York Times*, April 8, 1950.

22 James C. Clark, *Red Pepper and Gorgeous George: Claude Pepper’s Epic Defeat in the 1950 Democratic Primary* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 139.

23 *Ibid.*, 140.

24 D.R. Matthews and J.W. Prothro, “Political Factors and Negro Voter Registration in the South” *The American Political Science Review* 57(2), 355-367; D. R. Matthews and J.W. Prothro, “Social and Economic Factors and Negro Voter Registration in the South,” *The American Political Science Review* (57(1), 24-44.

ute to variance in Black registration. Key among socio-economic variables is the percent Black, which tended to depress Black voter registration across the South during the late 1950s, because, it has been argued, White repression and intimidation was highest in these areas. Matthews and Prothro²⁵ also find that Black education and Black income are positively correlated with Black registration, although these correlations decline when accounting for percent Black.

Among the political characteristics, Matthews and Prothro²⁶ find the largest variation in Black voter registration at the state level, with Mississippi on the low end and Tennessee on the high end. That is, the state itself is the political variable that best captures variations in Black political participation. These findings suggest that analysts should examine Black participation separately by state or via multi-level modeling. Given the paucity of candidate-level data, we choose the former.

Matthews and Prothro²⁷ find that institutional barriers (i.e., poll taxes and literacy tests), party factionalism, and Black activism contributed to variation in Black registration. In the former, poll taxes disproportionately disfranchised Blacks as African Americans were less likely than Whites to have the money for the tax. Literacy tests essentially gave the registrar of voters arbitrary power to determine voter qualifications; thus, the registrar could discriminate with relative abandon. In 1950, Florida had neither a poll tax or literacy tests, suggesting that the state should have relatively high Black registration rates.²⁸ Regarding Black activism, these scholars also find that local Black organizations, such as the Progressive Voter's League and the NAACP are associated with increases in Black participation.

Matthews and Prothro²⁹ (1963a) find that Democratic party factionalism also tends to produce higher levels of Black registration. Under a multi-faction system, it is argued that candidates are more likely to make racial appeals to Blacks as a means of defeating their opponents. While these scholars are careful to note that Black voters can usually discern candidates more favorably disposed to

25 Matthews and Prothro, "Social and Economic Factors."

26 Matthews and Prothro, "Political Factors."

27 Ibid.

28 For an excellent account of the fight to end the poll tax see Charles D. Farris, "The Re-Enfranchisement of Negroes in Florida," *Journal of Negro History* 39, no. 4 (October 1954): 259-283.

29 Matthews and Prothro, "Political Factors."

them and that this may affect Black participation, Matthews and Prothro have no measure of cross-racial mobilization or candidate outreach to Blacks. Adding this measure into the study of Black political participation in the pre-VRA period is our primary contribution. Finally, for obvious reasons, variables such as White violence and hostility tend to depress Black registration, but only in counties that are the most hostile.

Establishing Cross-Racial Mobilization

In this section, we first outline our theoretical framework, which explains why candidates varied in their method of covert cross-racial mobilization. This framework helps explain theoretically why Claude Pepper engaged in covert cross-racial mobilization via donations to the CIO to help mobilize Black voters; and why his opponent did not. Following David Mayhew,³⁰ we assume that each candidate is a rational actor where election, re-election, or ascension to a higher office is his or her central purpose. In other words, explanations for why a candidate courts certain blocs of voters, takes a certain policy stance, or sets a specific tone vis-à-vis race relations is largely a political decision driven by electoral goals. While this may not explain all political actors, as some actors may be solely motivated by ideological pursuits, we argue that the vast majority of serious candidates realize the necessity to get elected or re-elected in order to pursue their ideological goals.

With rational choice as their guiding motivation, candidates assess various geographic, demographic, and political characteristics of their political jurisdiction to determine whether to engage in cross-racial mobilization and the specific strategies that should be used in doing so. One characteristic concerns the racially dominant group. Candidates will assess the degree to which White backlash is a threat to their electoral coalition and electoral chances. If a candidate envisions White backlash or hostility as high, the candidate either will engage in anti-Black cross-racial mobilization,³¹ no mobilization, or covert cross-racial mobilization. In the latter case, the candidate hopes to benefit from the minority vote, but distances him or herself from a public association with the minority

30 David R. Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004).

31 Negative cross-racial mobilization occurs when a candidate goes out of their way to campaign against Black voters in order to court the "Negrophobe" White vote.

group. However, if a candidate determines they can eschew White backlash by courting minority groups quietly, then the candidate is likely to engage in positive covert cross-racial mobilization through either donations to outside groups, speaking in Black churches, or reaching out to Black voters via African-American radio or newspapers. In the modern era, candidates can conduct cross-racial mobilization more freely,³² but during times of racial unrest, white racial threat is more active and hence poses a bigger challenge to candidates.³³

A second factor is minority group characteristics. A White candidate should be more likely to court a minority bloc if that group is a large or potentially large pool of the electorate and socially organized. The key here is that the pool of registered voters has to be large enough to swing a close election. Candidates also assess the likelihood of a close election; if so, one or both candidates may be more likely to court the Black vote. Finally—and crucial to the present analysis—candidates assess their main opponent(s) political reputation. If the opponent—through their policy positions and past record—is perceived as a racial moderate, for instance, then the candidate is likely to take a racially conservative stance when it comes to cross-racial mobilization, and vice-versa. This is because candidates attempt to distinguish themselves from each other to the extent that voter groups are responsive to candidates' positions on the issues. During the 1950 Senate race in Florida all these factors, save for the latter, were the same for both candidates. Thus, the key variable that a-priori separates these two candidates' cross-racial mobilization stances is political reputation.

In 1950 Florida, White hostility was relatively high, as *Smith V. Allwright* and President Truman's civil rights program had begun to shake the White South's customs and traditions. However, several Black organizations—namely the NAACP and the Progressive Voter's League—were organizing around the state. By 1947, Florida had nearly 50,000 registered Black voters—not a huge margin, but large enough to sway the election outcome in a close contest.

32 Loren Collingwood, Matt A. Barreto, and Sergio I. Garcia-Rios, "Revisiting Latino Voting: Cross-Racial Mobilization in the 2012 Election," *Political Research Quarterly* 67, no. 3 (September 2014): 632-645.

33 D. Stephen Voss, "Beyond Racial Threat: Failure of an Old Hypothesis in the New South," *Journal of Politics* 58, no. 4 (November 1996): 1156-1170; Marylee C. Taylor, "How White Attitudes Vary with the Racial Composition of Local Populations: Numbers Count," *American Sociological Review* 63, no. 4 (August 1998): 512-535.

Furthermore, the trajectory was continued growth. And indeed, both candidates and the media perceived the election as competitive since Pepper had only won the 1944 contest by a 10,000 vote margin. Finally, with Pepper's relatively liberal/moderate record on race and foreign policy, a relatively unknown candidate like George Smathers could transform himself into a race-baiter and successfully capture a large portion of the racially disaffected White voter. Thus, a priori, we expect Smathers to run an anti-black CRM campaign and Pepper a covert CRM campaign. In the next section we show this to be the case; followed by an analysis showing that black political participation and voter registration were higher in areas that had the backing of Pepper's covert cross-racial mobilization.

The 1950 Senate Race Between Claude Pepper and George Smathers

In the pre-Voting Rights Act period in the South, we argue that cross-racial mobilization could not be conducted openly. Previous analyses looking to uncover CRM therefore may have looked past occurrences of politician's cross-racial behavior because such behavior was mostly covert. Candidates who openly campaigned for the Black vote or appeared too liberal on racial issues risked alienating the White voters who were needed to win. Alabama governor Jim Folsom lost the 1962 gubernatorial election in part because he was perceived as a racial liberal in a state that was openly hostile towards the African American community.³⁴ Therefore, where cross-racial mobilization occurred in the period preceding the VRA, it was often done covertly. Candidates sought to attract the Black vote covertly and often would praise segregation on the one-hand while funneling resources to the Black community—which was then used to signal to Black voters that they were ultimately one of the friendly candidates. Beyond Claude Pepper in Florida, examples of candidates who sought to mobilize the Black vote on their behalf, include, but are not limited to, Earl Long and Chep Morrison of Louisiana, Leroy Collins of Florida, Ellis Arnall of Georgia, James Coleman of Mississippi, and Terry Sandford of North Carolina.

³⁴ Carl Grafton and Anne Permaloff, *Big Mules and Branchheads: James E. Folsom and Political Power in Alabama* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008).

The 1950 U.S. Senate Democratic primary pitted two-term incumbent Pepper against Miami Congressman George Smathers, who announced his candidacy for the U.S. Senate in early January, 1950, by giving a speech in Orlando's coliseum to over 3,000 people.³⁵ In the South at the time, the Democratic primary was tantamount to election, which meant that both candidates had but four months to fully campaign until election day on May 5, 1950. Over the course of his two terms, Pepper had taken relatively liberal stances on the Russia and Black questions. It was quite clear early on that the campaign would be a referendum on Claude Pepper as Smathers went on a two-prong attack: Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) and Civil Rights; Communism and Pepper's support for the Soviet Union.³⁶

Why had Pepper taken relatively liberal stances on racial policy matters prior to the 1950 senate election? He was born in Alabama and lived in Tallahassee, which was located essentially in Florida's Black Belt.³⁷ Based on this alone, it would be tempting to expect Pepper to act like other Black Belt politicians: as a race-baiter. However, Pepper had national aspirations for office, as evidenced by his brief candidacy at the 1948 Democratic National Convention. Pepper had first sought to nominate Eisenhower in an attempt to unseat Truman but Eisenhower refused the nomination. Pepper then nominated himself, though his candidacy lasted only one day and he attracted but six and a half delegates.³⁸ The aspirations of Pepper to higher office meant that he had to consider the national viability of his policy positions, including on the Black question. Outside of the South, Blacks could both play a larger role in elections and the question of Black rights was not quite as one-sided as it was in Southern states. Pepper's more liberal stance on Black issues was thus likely due, in part, to national electoral considerations.

Newspaper accounts, archival data, and interviews with those involved in the campaign do paint a mixed picture with respect to the two candidates' racial strategies. Newspaper accounts intimate

35 Election outcomes in the South during this time period were determined in the primaries as any serious contender was a Democrat. Republicans essentially had zero party organization and no funding so could not run competitive campaigns in the general election.

36 Clark, *Red Pepper and Gorgeous George*.

37 Tallahassee is in Leon County, which contained 39.5% Black population in 1950.

38 *Orlando Sentinel*, November 29, 1992; Brian Lewis Crispell, *Testing the Limits: George Armistead Smathers and Cold War America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999).

that both candidates campaigned for the Black vote. A *New York Times* article a month before election day acknowledged this: "Both candidates are courting the Negro vote as much as they can without offending White voters."³⁹ In an interview several decades after the campaign, Smathers claimed that neither candidate spent much if any time discussing civil rights:

See, in 1950 the state was very conservative. Pepper had been very liberal, so he did not want to talk about it. I, being from Miami, was somewhat liberal myself. I didn't particularly want to talk about it. The result was that he and I did not discuss civil rights. I don't think he ever made a speech in which he referred to me as either strong or soft on civil rights. I know I never made a speech about him and his advocacy of civil rights. He was a strong civil rights guy. I was sort of strong civil rights, coming from Miami.⁴⁰

However, the bulk of archival evidence suggests that Pepper engaged in significantly more covert cross-racial mobilization than did Smathers, and that Smathers almost completely used race as a wedge issue to try and win racially disaffected White voters. Below, we present each candidate's campaign strategy vis-à-vis Black voters to demonstrate that the dynamics of cross-racial mobilization played a central role in the election and that Pepper financially and logistically helped various groups register Blacks primarily in Miami-Dade, Duval (Jacksonville), Hillsborough (Tampa), and Volusia Counties (Daytona Beach).

Claude Pepper

Given his past statements and positions that were ostensibly supportive of Black interests, campaign documents from both candidates' archives reveal that Pepper was the clear favorite among African American voters. Through constituency mail and advocacy, the Black community made it clear to Pepper that they supported his re-election efforts. For instance, in a letter to Pepper, Black newsman Edward D. Davis states, "Florida's colored voters appreciate the statesmanship you have displayed and they are unanimous in their determination to unite forces in helping to return you to

39 *New York Times*, April 8, 1950

40 http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/resources/pdf/Smathers_interview_2.pdf, p. 38

Washington.”⁴¹ In another communication, Davis said: “Once members of our racial group are qualified, they can be safely counted in your column.”⁴² Another Black leader, Herman Williams of the 20th Century Club, pushed Pepper to participate in the electoral mobilization of African Americans:

The purpose of this communication is to determine if I may come to Washington... to hold a conference with you relative to the matter of organizing and mobilizing the voting strength of Negro citizens of Florida...the mobilization of scores of social clubs, who are able to influence young and old through a unique ‘family like’ contact...if you are interested in another term, and we pray to God you are, we believe we can be the winning team to put you over.⁴³

Based on his reputation as the more liberal of the two candidates, Pepper was openly courted by Black leaders, making the covert mobilization of Black voters that much easier for his campaign. Since leaders within the Black community were reaching out, Pepper could much more easily engage in covert-CRM while still campaigning on a segregationist platform when speaking to White audiences. In the end, the African American constituency, along with organized labor, comprised the 1950 Pepper coalition. Thus, even though the bulk of White voters did not support greater Black inclusion in the political process, Pepper had an electoral incentive to expand the African American vote.

Pepper engaged in cross-racial mobilization in two ways. The first is a more broad form of mobilization in that it was targeted at all Blacks, not just Blacks living in a particular jurisdiction or of a socio-economic class. Pepper sent cues to African American voters primarily through his earlier policy stances.⁴⁴ He favored an end to the filibuster in the U.S. Senate, arguing that it was undemocratic, and that it was used as a way to minimize the electorate (a cue to Southern Blacks). During this time period, African Americans

41 Letter from Edward D. Davis to Claude Pepper, June 9, 1949, Claude Pepper Papers, FSU Special Collections and Archives Repository.

42 Ibid.

43 Letter from Herman Williams to Claude Pepper, September 3, 1949, Claude Pepper Papers, FSU Special Collections and Archives Repository.

44 Michael K. Fauntroy, *Republicans and the Black Vote* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2008) discusses four categories that parties use to court Black voters: policy initiatives, political activities, state and local Black organizations that work with parties, and national African American organizations that work with parties.

widely believed, correctly, that the filibuster was used to stall civil rights legislation. Pepper also opposed the poll tax, supported anti-lynching legislation, and supported President Roosevelt's FEPC wartime measure. The latter produced explosive reactions among Southern reactionaries, as it was seen as federal encroachment in the workplace. During the campaign, Pepper tried to distance himself from the FEPC, but Smathers nonetheless used the FEPC as his primary racial attack. Taken together, these policy stances made Pepper very popular among African Americans, as indicated by hundreds of supporting letters from Black constituents and from Black organizations, such as the Progressive Voters' League.⁴⁵ However, while morally correct, these policy-backed CRM efforts were a tactical mistake for Pepper as he ended up losing the election in part because he was perceived as a racial liberal by a large chunk of Florida's White voters.

The second way Pepper engaged in cross-racial mobilization was via the covert support of a large Black registration campaign led at the local level by African Americans with union organization help. Pepper's support was quiet so as to minimize the likelihood of White voters hearing about the effort. While Pepper was not an architect of the scheme, his campaign was loosely affiliated (financially) with the registration drive, which targeted Blacks primarily in the large cities of Florida. Indeed, registration campaign organizers contacted Pepper ten months prior to the 1950 primary, seeking his input.⁴⁶

That same summer (1949), the record indicates that George L-P Weaver of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO)—a major union—visited several Black communities in Jacksonville, Miami, Tampa, and Daytona Beach to gauge African American sentiment towards Pepper. Weaver selected these counties not because their percent Black was the highest in the state, but rather the size of their Black population was among the highest. Weaver concluded: "In each city that I visited, after talking with innumerable negro leaders, I found a general enthusiasm and, without exception, sentiment expressed in favor of Senator Pepper's re-election." Weaver continues, "it was agreed that in view of the low CIO membership in the state of Florida, the best method to increase the Negro

45 Letter from Harry T. Moore to Claude Pepper, April 14, 1949, Claude Pepper Papers, FSU Special Collections and Archives Repository.

46 Letter from Edward D. Davis to Claude Pepper June 9, 1949, Claude Pepper Papers, FSU Special Collections and Archives Repository.

registration and vote would be by aiding the existing organizations that are geared to political action in these several communities... This aid could take the form of contributing toward the payment of salaries and expenses incidental to a registration drive and organization to get the vote out on election day.”⁴⁷ In other words, Weaver would secure funding for the registration campaign, which would be implemented by actors at the local level.

The findings of Weaver’s investigations were communicated to Pepper associates. In another letter from Weaver to fellow intriguer, Ira Davis, Weaver states that the Pepper folks support the plan: “A copy of this report was sent to Senator Pepper, and I have had a chance to talk to the Senator and Mr. Clement, his political secretary, since my return...They [Pepper] are still desirous of selecting a Negro to be quietly put on Senator Pepper’s payroll, in order to represent him in the state and help coordinate the activities. I would appreciate it if you would send me two or three recommendations for such a person.”⁴⁸

Pepper’s Executive Assistant, Jim Clements, met with Edward Davis, the Black newspaper man, to discuss Pepper’s financial support for the registration plan. Based in part on a two day meeting with the Pepper campaign, Black leaders put together a plan for a targeted registration drive in Duval, Hillsborough, Volusia, and Miami counties. A “Committee for Full Registration” was set up to bring their plan to fruition, and Pepper’s campaign covertly sent the committee about \$4,000 to help fund the drive—which was run primarily by local Blacks on the ground.⁴⁹

In the final analysis, the Pepper campaign did not—on the surface—appear to mobilize the Black community, beyond his policy stances from previous years. Pepper did not unabashedly court the Black vote like some White candidates did in later years. The fears and racial hostility of White voters were simply too high in 1950 to allow Pepper to out-and-out court that constituency. As such, Pepper refrained from supporting or really even discussing civil rights issues while on the stump, claimed to be a supporter of segregation when talking to White audiences, and claimed to oppose the

47 Memorandum from George L-P Weaver to Jack Kroll, dated June 24, 1949, Claude Pepper Papers, FSU Special Collections and Archives Repository.

48 Letter from George L-P Weaver to Ira Davis, July 7 1949, Claude Pepper Papers, FSU Special Collections and Archives Repository.

49 Letter from Edward Davis to Mr. Clements, September 22, 1949, Claude Pepper Papers, FSU Special Collections and Archives Repository.

Federal Employment Practices Commission (FEPC).⁵⁰ Other than taking a variety of ostensibly pro-Black policy stances over the years, Pepper's cross-racial mobilization was entirely covert, consisting of working through back channels to register African American voters. While it is impossible to know for sure whether the registration campaign would have been successful without Pepper's covert assistance, the fact that Pepper's campaign did not dissuade the registration campaign—as did Smathers—and actually contributed to it financially as well as logistically is strong evidence of CCRM. In reality, the nexus between Black leaders, the Black community, along with the covert assistance of White leaders who stood to benefit from enhanced Black registration, formed much of the impetus behind changes in Black registration immediately preceding the 1950 Democratic primary election.

George Smathers

George Smathers took the completely opposite tact with respect to mobilizing the Black vote. While he was not a defender of White supremacy in the vein of Southern demagogues Theodore Bilbo or Eugene Talmadge, Smathers used Pepper's relative racial and economic liberalism against him to appeal to the disaffected White, upscale, and rural vote. Smathers tapped into southern fears about Black voter registration, civil rights, and government encroachment. Indeed, he concluded his standard stump speech by asking White audiences if they "like the idea of Florida elections being controlled through the Negro vote."⁵¹

Because of Pepper's reputation prior to the 1950 election, electorally there was little incentive for Smathers to also engage in cross-racial mobilization. Even if Smathers bent left on racial concerns, it would be hard to win over the Black vote since that vote was already fairly enthusiastic about Pepper. Instead, it made sense for Smathers to campaign to move to the right on racial matters, as Pepper was already going to receive most of the Black vote given his past policy stances and reputation within the Black community. This meant that despite Smathers later thinking of himself as a "strong civil rights guy" (quotation added) his campaign had a heavy incentive to criticize Pepper's stance on Black issues and to

50 Clark, *Red Pepper and Gorgeous George*.

51 Taken from Smathers stump speech, campaign trail 1950. The George A. Smathers Collection, Special Areas Studies Collection. Box 319, Campaign Files - 1950 Election 1934-1958.

stake out a position as the candidate for White supremacy in the election.

His racial point of attack focused primarily on the Federal Employment Practices Commission (FEPC), which he used as both a racial and small government (i.e., freedom to discriminate) appeal. This approach can be seen in a typical press release:

George Smathers, currently campaigning in West Florida for U.S. Senator, is maintaining a slashing attack on Claude Pepper's record on legislation to set up a Federal Fair Employment Practices Commission... 'Stripped of all its honeyed words,' Smathers says, 'FEPC is nothing more than an attempt by Northern radicals to break down segregation...If they can pass a law to say whom you may hire and fire, they can pass one to say whom your daughter will marry.'⁵²

Smathers attacked Pepper on the FEPC and civil rights on radio, newspapers, magazines, and in brochures. Indeed, Smathers attacked Pepper on the FEPC in nearly every single speech, and he often brought up how the FEPC would bring down "our Southern traditions."⁵³

Given his general approach, it is no wonder that Black voters remained weary of Smathers—as indicated by his lack of support among Black-heavy precincts in Miami-Dade County and Duval County.⁵⁴ Smathers did not launch or support any Black registration campaign, because these voters would be unlikely to vote for him. Instead he warned Blacks against voting if they were ineligible to register, as an attempt to reduce the electoral impact of the Black vote.

We have now laid out an account of the two candidates' strategies regarding the emerging Black vote. Both candidates were concerned with the rise of the Black vote; however, just one candidate, Pepper, seriously engaged the bloc by covertly supporting a Black registration campaign held primarily in four counties. The other candidate took the opposite tact and spent essentially no time or effort mobilizing the Black vote. Indeed, he took the opposite tact

52 Pepper's FEPC Record, Press release by Smathers' campaign. The George A. Smathers Collection, Special Areas Studies Collection.

53 Smathers speech transcripts. The George A. Smathers Collection, Special Areas Studies Collection. Box 319, Campaign Files - 1950 Election 1934-1958.

54 Precinct results from Duval County reveal similar findings to Miami-Dade. Claude Pepper Papers, FSU Special Collections and Archives Repository.

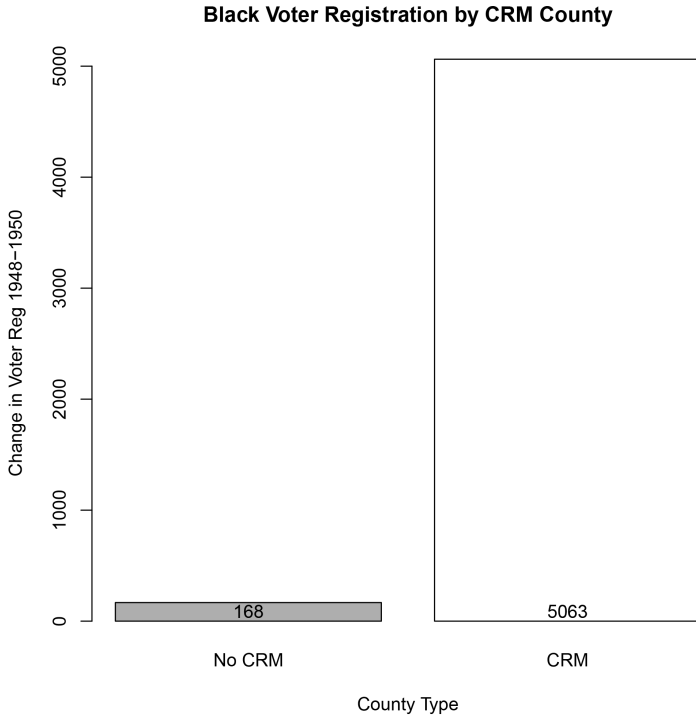
and employed threats against Black voters by questioning the legality of their registration. The next section presents a brief data analysis that supports the implications of our case study—that Claude Pepper’s covert CRM may have helped bring about greater Black political participation.

An Empirical Analysis of the Pepper-Smathers Race

The historical documents support that Claude Pepper did engage in covert cross-racial mobilization in 1950 through financial contributions to the CIO, who in turn sought to register Blacks in Florida. As we have argued, this makes perfect sense in a race that was close and where the Black vote could potentially tip the scales in favor of Pepper, as African-Americans were no longer excluded from participation in the Democratic primary as a result of *Smith v. Allwright*. However, our qualitative analysis does not provide any evidence that the attempts at CCRM were in any way successful in increasing Black political participation. For that, we must turn to an empirical analysis of the change in Black participation in Florida in the wake of the 1950 election. If Pepper (and the CIO) were successful in increasing Black participation we would expect greater Black registration in those counties where the CIO was actively engaged in mobilization of the African-American community than in those where this did not occur.

As Figure 2 shows, there was indeed a significant difference between those counties in Florida where the CIO was engaged in Black registration drives and those where they were not. For those counties without cross-racial mobilization, there was a significantly smaller increase in Black registration between 1948 and 1950 than in those counties where CRM occurred based on the findings of our qualitative analysis of the Pepper-Smathers race. This suggests that not only did the Pepper campaign engage in covert cross-racial mobilization but also that this was successful in increasing Black participation.

To further examine the effect of cross-racial mobilization on Black participation, we collected theoretically relevant census variables, voter registration statistics, and other relevant variables around 1950 to evaluate predictors of Black registration for a regression analysis. The dependent variable is the total number of Blacks registered prior to the 1950 primary minus the total number of Blacks registered prior to the 1948 primary. Thus, we evaluate the change in Black registration in the two years prior to the



Black voter registration increases 1948-1950 in counties targeted by Pepper allies.

election—the time period when candidates would begin thinking about the election. The independent variables consist of a few broad categories: Black characteristics, White characteristics, and electoral characteristics.⁵⁵

We ran three different models to assess the effect of cross-racial mobilization. The first model is the “Black agency” model where we only include Black characteristic variables in addition to control variables. One Black characteristic variable emerges as statistically significant: the number of NAACP members within a county. This makes sense because counties that have high levels of NAACP membership are places where Blacks are organized politically and therefore better equipped to challenge barriers to voter registration. In 1950 Florida, income, mobility, percent Black, and education did

⁵⁵ For a detailed description of the variables included in the models, see Appendix 1.

not have a statistically significant effect on the change in Black registration between 1948-1950. It could be that these variables—on the whole—are structural measures and that their relationship to Black registration is more long-term as opposed to short term.⁵⁶ That said, Black education nears statistical significance at the .10 level and is substantively quite large. If we had the data to replicate this analysis across the entire South during this time period, surely the larger number of observations would deem the variable significant.

Model two adds the additional White characteristic variable of White violence. As expected, the coefficient is negative indicating that fewer Blacks in violent localities registered between 1948-1950. However, the variable is not statistically significant, which is supportive of the findings from Matthews and Prothro (1963a, 1963b): the effect of White violence diminishes with the presence of Black race organizations.⁵⁷ It may be that by 1950, White violence—or the threat thereof—was no longer a major deterrent to Black registration. Model three adds in the covert cross-racial mobilization measure. This variable is both large and statistically significant, indicating that Blacks living in counties with the Pepper-supported CIO registration drive are much more likely to register to vote between 1948-1950 than their counterparts in other counties. Finally, we note that model fit only increases substantially once we account for the covert cross-racial mobilization variable, as the adjusted *R*² moves from 0.3 to 0.55.

To aid interpretation, we present predicted values plots (Figure 7) of our two statistically significant variables from model three. According to the model, controlling for other variables, the impact of NAACP membership on Black registration has a significantly larger effect as we move from minimum-to-maximum on the range of the NAACP membership variable. Indeed, the change is approximately 2,700 new Black registrants. Finally, using the same approach, covert cross-racial mobilization's effect is approximately 3,900 new Black registrants. Thus, covert cross-racial mobilization and Black agency—as measured via NAACP membership—work in tandem to produce relatively high levels of Black registration at the

56 We checked this argument and it holds for Black education but not the other variables.

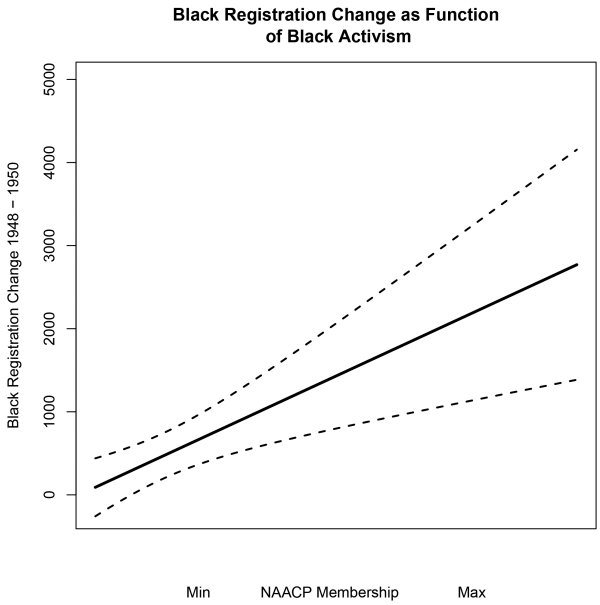
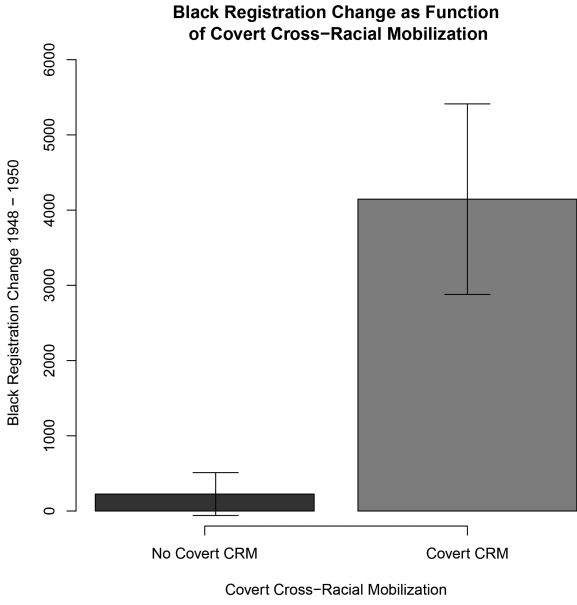
57 Matthews and Prothro, "Social and Economic Factors"; Matthews and Prothro, "Political Factors."

Table 2. Predictor of Black Registration 1948–1950.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Black Registration Change		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Number of NAACP Members	2.25*** (0.57)	2.26*** (0.57)	1.59*** (0.47)
Percent Black HH less than 500/year	2.48 (25.58)	3.21 (25.86)	-1.44 (20.55)
Percent Black Mobility	-1.20 (3.07)	-1.17 (3.10)	-0.80 (2.46)
Percent Black	8.26 (18.61)	9.14 (18.93)	4.56 (15.05)
Black Median Education	487.93 (304.46)	510.87 (314.19)	95.02 (259.04)
White Violence		-118.37 (351.15)	26.33 (279.88)
Covert Cross-Racial Mobilization			3919.69*** (657.15)
Electoral Competition 1944 Senate	-8.18 (11.88)	-8.88 (12.15)	-9.03 (9.65)
Constant	-2213.95 (2140.39)	-2299.78 (2171.36)	-22.80 (1765.90)
Observation	67	67	67
R ²	0.36	0.36	0.60
Adjusted R ²	0.30	0.28	0.55
Residual Std. Error	1397.93 (df = 60)	1408.37 (df = 59)	1118.30 (df = 58)
F Statistic	5.61*** (df = 6; 60)	4.75*** (df = 7; 59)	11.04*** (df = ; 5)

Note: *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01

county level. These are important findings because the former has not yet been demonstrated in verifiable ways.



Covariates covert cross-racial mobilization and Black activism are both associated with increases in Black registration between 1948 and 1950.

Conclusion

This paper engages an old debate about correlates of Black registration during the Civil Rights era. Scholars have long been interested in this question to tease out the degree that socio-economic or political variables are responsible for positive changes in Black registration. Matthews and Prothro⁵⁸ discovered that both types of variables account for about 25% of the variance in Black registration, respectively. In their follow-up analysis of Florida towns and cities, Clubok, Grove, and Farris⁵⁹ found cross-racial mobilization rampant. They suggested that the cross-racial mobilization phenomenon may account for additional Black registration variance.

However, no one since has revisited this thesis with any sort of rigor, in part because the analysis often requires in-depth archival data. In addition, though, the study of Black participation shifted dramatically with the passage of the Voting Rights Act. Shortly after the passage of the act, Black registration rose dramatically in the most racially repressive states like Alabama, South Carolina, and Mississippi. Thus, scholars set out to examine the correlates of these shifts and to see county-by-county, whether federal examiners indeed contributed to Black registration.⁶⁰ While the post-VRA research was certainly a worthy endeavor, the question as to whether White candidates and party leaders helped contribute to Black participation prior to the VRA has remained unanswered and the methods used to court the Black vote unexamined.

The present analysis provides evidence that not only did candidates try to covertly mobilize African-Americans following the *Smith v. Allwright* decision but one of the strategies that was employed to try to avoid alienating a White electorate that was still hostile to Black voters. By providing support to the CIO, the Pepper campaign gave itself plausible deniability regarding the mobilization of African-Americans while also giving Blacks a reason to vote for Pepper in the 1950 primary. However, while the archival evidence supports that the Pepper campaign engaged in covert cross-racial mobilization, it doesn't tell us whether this had any measurable effect on Black political participation. For that we

58 Matthews and Prothro, "Social and Economic Factors"; Matthews and Prothro, "Political Factors."

59 Clubok, De Grove, and Farris, "The Manipulated Negro Vote."

60 Thompson, "The Voting Rights Act in North Carolina"; Colby, "The Voting Rights Act and Black Registration in Mississippi"; Daniel, "Negro Political Behavior."

turned to a statistical analysis of the effect of cross-racial mobilization on changes in Black voter registration between 1948 and 1950. We found evidence that not only were candidates—namely Claude Pepper—engaged in an indirect form of cross-racial mobilization, but that this appears to have contributed to increases in Black registration. Between 1948-1950, places where Pepper and the CIO launched registration drives had about 3,900 more registered Black voters compared to places with no CIO registration campaign. The Pepper campaign's attempts to mobilize Blacks do appear to have had a positive effect on African-American participation, though the extent that these findings generalize to other states and elections is uncertain. This paper provides a baseline for future analyses by laying out research methodology that combines archival findings with statistical data to better understand cross-racial mobilization and its effects throughout the South in the wake of *Smith v. Allwright*.

Appendix: Variable Construction

Regarding the Black characteristics variables, we include a measure for Black median education from the 1950 Census. Counties with higher Black education rates are expected to contain higher percentages of Black registrants. We include a measure for Black income, which is the percent of Black household that make less than \$500 per year. Since this is the lowest income category, we expect a negative coefficient. We include a variable to measure Black mobility, which is the percentage of Black households that moved within the last year. It is expected that voter registration will decrease as Black mobility rises because residential mobility tends to depress political participation.⁶¹ Percent Black—the variable deemed key by scholars⁶²—is measured as the percentage of all county residents who are Black. This variable is expected to take on a negative coefficient because Whites in these areas are most wedded to White supremacy. Finally, we include a measure of NAACP membership to capture Black social organization. This variable is a count of the total number of NAACP members by county for the year 1947 when the NAACP enumerated county memberships across the United States. The coefficient for this variable is expected to take on a positive value because counties with strong NAACP organizations are more likely to have the infrastructure to begin challenging the status quo by legal and organizational methods.

Turning to the White group characteristics, we include a White violence variable where the value indicates the number of acts of racial violence against Blacks inside the county. This variable was created by Matthews and Prothro and is a combination of the Tuskegee Institute's lynching of Blacks between 1900 and 1931⁶³ and the Southern Regional Council's list of violent acts between 1955-1960. We treat this variable as a measure of latent White violence within the county, and expect a negative coefficient value because greater racial violence and intimidation within a county may deter many Blacks from registering to vote.

61 Raymond E. Wolfinger, and Steven J. Rosentone, *Who Votes?* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980).

62 Matthews and Prothro, "Social and Economic Factors"; Matthews and Prothro, "Political Factors"; Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*.

63 Charles Spurgeon Johnson, Lewis Wade Jones, B.H. Junker, E.S. Marks, P. Valien, and E. R. Embree, *Statistical Atlas of Southern Counties: Listing and Analysis of Socio-Economic indices of 1104 Southern Counties* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941).

Our key independent variable is covert cross-racial mobilization, which we measure as a dummy variable where Volusia (Daytona Beach), Hillsborough (Tampa), Miami-Dade, and Duval (Jacksonville) counties receive a one and all other counties a zero. These are the four counties where the CIO and Pepper launched their Black registration campaign. It is expected that the change in Black registration will be higher in these counties than elsewhere; thus the coefficient should be positive.

Finally, to measure electoral competition, we use the closeness of the 1944 U.S. Senate contest. This variable is measured as $100 - (\text{absolute}(\text{candidate 1} - \text{candidate 2}))$. The variable is measured in such a way that higher numbers are indicative of greater competition. We expect this variable to take on a positive coefficient.