



**Yale University**  
Department of Economics

**Yale Working Papers on Economic Applications and Policy**  
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P.O. Box 208268  
New Haven, CT 06520-8268

**DISCUSSION PAPER NO. 16**

**How Black Candidates Affect Voter Turnout\***

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January 2006

\*I thank Elizabeth Oltmans Ananat, Victor Chernozhukov, Esther Duflo, Jonathan Gruber, Lawrence Katz, Alexis León, Sendhil Mullainathan, Rohini Pande, Cynthia Perry, James Poterba, James Snyder, three anonymous referees, seminar participants at Carnegie Mellon University, Columbia University, Federal Reserve Bank of New York, Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, New York University, Stanford University, University of California Los Angeles, University of Chicago, University of Michigan, University of Pennsylvania, University of Wisconsin, Yale University and the American Economic Association Pipeline Project's Summer Conference for insightful comments. I am grateful to Alfred Baltimore of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies for assistance with the candidate race data. Financial support from the National Science Foundation is gratefully acknowledged.

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# **How Black Candidates Affect Voter Turnout**

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## **Abstract**

Both Black and White voter turnout increases 2-3 percentage points with each Black Democrat on the ballot. Given the groups' representations in the population, the White response is numerically greater. Whites of both parties are less likely to vote for their parties' candidate when s/he is Black. The turnout findings are not explained away by voter, election, or politician characteristics. However the fact that there is no turnout response to Black Republicans suggests that a perception of Blacks' ideology may be a factor.

**KEY WORDS:** African Americans, political economy, voter turnout  
**JEL CLASSIFICATIONS:** H0, J15, P48

## I. Introduction

In 1970 Reverend Andrew Young of Atlanta, Georgia launched a campaign to become the first Black Southern congressman since Reconstruction. On the day of the general election, 65 percent of White registered voters went to the polls to voice their opinions on this issue.

Statewide, White turnout was only 50 percent. Reverend Young was defeated [Delaney 1970].

Twenty-eight years later in the same state, three Black candidates vied for three separate statewide offices. Black turnout soared. Blacks comprised 29 percent of those casting ballots that day, up from 16 percent in the previous interim election. Two of three Black candidates won their contests [Sack 1998].

These anecdotes suggest a positive impact of Black candidates on the voter turnout of two distinct groups: Black voters who come out in support and White voters who come out in opposition. Examining the degree to which these anecdotes are borne out in the data is important not only for understanding elections which involve Black candidates, but also for interpreting the results of any additional contests on the ballot that day. Elections do not occur in isolation. On the day that the Atlanta electorate handed Young a defeat, they also helped decide statewide contests for governor and lieutenant governor. These contests were likely impacted by the increased turnout in response to Young's candidacy.<sup>1</sup>

This spillover of turnout effects motivates the methodology employed in this paper. The vast majority of the voting literature treats each electoral competition as if it were the sole contest of the day. In this paper I consider several races in tandem, which is in fact how they occur. I sum the total number of Blacks on the ballot, focusing on contests for the United States House of Representatives and higher offices. Using this metric and panels of both state and district observations for the general election years 1982 to 2000, I find that each Black Democratic candidate on the ballot increases district turnout by approximately 2 percentage points.

Examining impact by race, I find that the increase in Black and White turnout is similar, about 2

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<sup>1</sup> The winners were Jimmy Carter (governor) and Lester Maddox (lieutenant governor).

to 3 percentage points for each racial group in response to a Black Democratic candidate on the ballot. Black Republican candidates, on the other hand, are associated with no such increase in the turnout of the aggregate citizenry or of either racial group.

Who are the Whites who are responding to a Black Democratic candidate on the ballot? They are both Democrats (who increase turnout 7 percentage points) and Republicans (who increase their turnout by 5 percentage points). However, party affiliation does not map directly to party selected on the ballot. Survey results demonstrate that White voters of both parties are more likely to vote against their own party's candidate when their own party's candidate is Black.

The key limitation of this analysis is the endogeneity of Black candidates on the ballot. While state fixed effects control for any time-invariant omitted state characteristics, there still remains the possibility that the conditional correlation between Black candidates and turnout could be due to omitted election, voter, or candidate characteristics that change over time. Examining the impact of lags and leads of Black candidates on contemporary turnout, I find no evidence that the basic result is caused by some underlying trend in political views. Further, the additions of controls for contemporary voter views, voter political knowledge and candidate characteristics do not substantively change the point estimate of the impact of Black candidates on the voting behavior of White voters.<sup>2</sup> The fact that voters respond to Black Democrats but not to Black Republicans, however, does suggest that voters' perceived polarization between the candidates may be part of the reason for increased turnout. Black Democrats are viewed as far more liberal than their non-Black counterparts.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows: Section II presents hypotheses on why there may be a link between Black candidates and increased turnout. Section III provides the data and methodology. Section IV details the results and Section V concludes.

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<sup>2</sup> This analysis is done using the National Election Survey. I do not perform a similar analysis for Black voters because the sample size for Blacks is too limited to draw any meaningful conclusions.

## II. Why Black Candidates May Raise Turnout

Anecdotes aside, there are several reasons why we might observe a conditional correlation between Black candidates and voter turnout. The first stems from the theoretical and empirical literature that demonstrates that politician ideology can influence policy. (See for example Alesina [1988], Wittman [1990] and Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart [2001].) The fact that Black employment is higher in cities with Black mayors [Eisenger 1982] and that Black legislators receive higher scores on the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Index for their voting records [Cameron, Epstein, O'Halloran 1996] suggests that Black politicians may increase transfers to Black constituents. However, the possibilities of omitted constituency characteristics driving these results mean that they cannot be interpreted in a causal manner. In other countries the reservation of leadership positions for members of particular ethnic groups allows for the identification of the impact of politician race on transfers to constituents of various racial groups. For example, Pande [2003] exploits the reservation of village leadership positions in India for members of particular tribes and castes, to demonstrate that leaders increase transfers to members of their own ethnic group. Unfortunately, due to the lack of exogenous variation in leadership ethnicity we have no conclusive evidence for the United States.

Secondly, whether or not voters believe that the race of the elected official impacts the distribution of resources, Black candidates may increase turnout simply due to voter preferences for representation by a person of one's own race. Previous lab work manipulating candidate descriptions and race provides mixed evidence on Whites preferences for Black candidates over otherwise identical White candidates. (See Terkildsen [1993] and Sigelman, Sigelman, Walkosz, and Nitz [1995].)

Thirdly, Black candidates may raise turnout owing to a lack of information on the part of voters. In low-information elections voters rely on cues such as candidate party, incumbency status, race and gender to determine candidate position. Employing candidate descriptions that randomly vary by race, McDermott [1998] shows that respondents view Black candidates as

being more liberal than identically described White candidates. Seeing a Black Democratic candidate on the ballot, voters may infer that there is a great ideological distance between the Democratic and Republican candidates and hence much at stake. Ideally one would test this hypothesis by examining whether increased turnout can be “explained away” by candidate ideology and/or perceived candidate ideology. Unfortunately, such a metric is not available. Therefore I rely on three more crude tests. First, I compare voter turnout in the face of Black Democratic candidates and Black Republican candidates. Secondly, I simply control for voter perception of party ideology during the time of the election. Thirdly, I compare voter turnout in the face of incumbent Black candidates (for whom voters should presumably have information on ideology) and non-incumbent Black candidates. I shed additional light on the lack of information story by focusing in some specifications solely on senatorial elections, where voters arguably have more information than in elections for the House of Representatives.

Finally, the Black candidate voter turnout link may simply be due to omitted time variant characteristics of elections, voters or candidates. Therefore I examine the robustness of the basic result to the addition of controls for contemporary voter views, voter political knowledge and candidate characteristics.

I present these results in detail, after describing the data and methodology in the next section.

### III. Data and Methodology

I combine data on the race/ethnicity of House, Senate and gubernatorial candidates with voter turnout data from both official election results and from surveys of voting age individuals.

#### *III.A. Candidate Data*

Data on the name, state, district, party, office sought, incumbency status and votes received for all congressional and gubernatorial candidates, 1982-2000 were generously provided

by James Snyder.<sup>3</sup> I limit attention to major party (Democratic or Republican) candidates seeking office in general elections occurring in even numbered years. General elections for House of Representatives, Senate and 45/50 governorships occur in even years.<sup>4</sup> I rely on various issues of Focus Magazine<sup>5</sup> as well as the Associated Press Candidate Biographies<sup>6,7</sup> to code the race/ethnicity of the remaining 9,253 candidate observations. I then collapse the data to electoral contest/year cells.

Table I summarizes these data. During the time frame of the study, Black candidates were most present in House elections, 9 percent of which featured at least one Black candidate. That figure is 4 percent for the Senate and less than 2 percent for gubernatorial races. In 14 percent of House elections that include Black candidates, a single Black candidate runs unopposed. Black candidates never run unopposed for Senate or governor. In contested House elections, a Black candidate meets another Black candidate 29 percent of the time. A Black candidate never meets a Black candidate in a Senate or gubernatorial election in this time period. Finally Table I shows that in contested elections with a single Black candidate, the Black candidate is more likely to be the Democrat: 74 percent of the time in the House, 58 percent of the time in the Senate, and 75 percent of the time for the Governor's mansion.

### *III.B. District Official Turnout Data*

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<sup>3</sup> These data are partially available as Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research Study Number 7757.

<sup>4</sup> The timing of the gubernatorial races has changed in some states across time. Currently Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Jersey and Virginia hold elections in odd years.

<sup>5</sup> Available on the website of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

<sup>6</sup> Available on Lexis-Nexis.

<sup>7</sup> When these sources failed to identify race, I consulted newspaper articles and Internet resources. Two particularly helpful sites were [www.politicalgraveyard.com](http://www.politicalgraveyard.com) which lists the race of many candidates and the CNN politics website which includes photographs of candidates. For 1.3 percent of candidates, biographical information contained no definitive identification of race. These candidates were coded White. Therefore it is possible that this analysis undercounts Black candidates. In the case of four candidates of unknown race who oppose Black candidates, analyses were re-run coding these candidates as Black. Results are robust to this change.

Using the total votes received by House candidates to proxy total district turnout,<sup>8</sup> I use the candidate race data to run equations of the following form:

$$(1) Y_{dt} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{TBD}_{dt} + \beta_2 \text{TBR}_{dt} + \beta_3 \text{SEN}_{st} + \beta_4 \text{GOV}_{st} + \beta_5 \text{SINCRUN}_{st} + \beta_6 \text{GINCRUN}_{st} + \beta_7 \text{HINCRUN}_{st} + \eta_t + \gamma_{dt} + \varepsilon_{dt},$$

where d indexes districts, s states and t time. Y is the share of voting eligibles who turn out to vote.<sup>9</sup> TBD and TBR are the key independent variables: the total number of contested elections (of the House, Senate and gubernatorial elections) that include Black Democratic (Republican) candidates running against non-Black candidates. The maximum possible value for TBD, TDR and the sum of the two variables is 3. SEN and GOV are dummies for senatorial and gubernatorial races. (House elections take place in every election year; presidential elections are captured by the year effects.) SINCRUN, GINCRUN and HINCRUN are dummies indicating whether an incumbent is running for Senate, governor or House, respectively.<sup>10</sup> I allow for year to year variation in national voting trends by including year effects ( $\eta_t$ ). Additionally, I control for district characteristics by including district\*redistricting period fixed effects ( $\gamma_{dt}$ ). The number of Blacks on the ballot in a state is likely correlated across time. To adjust for this lack of independence, I cluster the standard errors at the state level as prescribed by Bertrand, Duflo and Mullainathan [2004].

The limitation of official turnout data is the lack of voter demographics. To examine turnout effects by race and party, I must rely on surveys which only allow for state level analyses.

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<sup>8</sup> Data are normalized using census population data. Given that roll off—abstaining from casting a vote in a particular contest on the ballot—typically does not occur in higher level, more publicized elections [Vanderleeuw and Liu 2002] the House votes should well approximate turnout. However, this may not be the case when the House election is uncontested thereby giving voters no incentive to mark the ballot for this contest. For this reason I control for whether the House election is contested. Further I perform the analysis with and without the district/years with uncontested House elections. Results do not vary substantively.

<sup>9</sup> I define a person as voting eligible if s/he is a citizen who is at least 18 years of age.

<sup>10</sup> The expected closeness of each election may also impact turnout. In robustness checks, I include ex-post closeness of the various contests on the ballot as an additional covariate. The basic pattern of results is unchanged. In tables I present results without the closeness variables because of their potential endogeneity.



Before turning to these surveys, I demonstrate that the relationship between Black candidates and turnout holds at the state level more general.

### *III.C. State Official Turnout Data*

Data on state level turnout<sup>11</sup> are merged with the candidate race data to run regressions of the form:

$$(2) Y_{st} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{TBD}_{st} + \beta_2 \text{TBR}_{st} + \beta_3 \text{SEN}_{st} + \beta_4 \text{GOV}_{st} + \beta_5 \text{SINCRUN}_{st} + \beta_6 \text{GINCRUN}_{st} + \beta_7 \text{HINCRUN}_{st} + \eta_t + \gamma_s + \varepsilon_{st},$$

where TBD<sup>12</sup> is now defined as

$$(3) \frac{\sum_{n=1}^N (\text{HBD}_n = 1)}{N} + (\text{SBD} = 1) + (\text{GBD} = 1)$$

and n indexes congressional districts in a state/year. N is the total number of districts in the state/year. HBD is an indicator for whether the House election includes a Black Democratic candidate running against a non-Black. SBD and GBD are the analogous variables for the state level elections. The remaining variables in Equation 2 are defined as in Equation 1 with the exception of HINCRUN which is now the proportion of House elections involving an incumbent.  $\gamma_s$  is now a vector of state fixed effects. Cells are weighted by number of districts in the state. Standard errors continue to be clustered at the state level.

### *III.D. Current Population Survey Data*

The limitation of official turnout data at any level of aggregation is the lack of demographic information on those turning out. To examine results by race and party I turn to two surveys of voting age Americans. The first is the Current Population Survey (CPS), fielded to approximately 100,000 citizens age 18 or older in November of even years. In addition to whether or not they voted, respondents are asked for demographic information including

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<sup>11</sup> Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research Study Number 1248.

<sup>12</sup> TBR is defined analogously.

education, employment status, age, income, gender, marital status, state of residence (but not district) and race. (See Appendix I for survey data sample means.)

By combining candidate race/ethnicity data with CPS data collapsed to the state/year level I can run regressions of the form:

$$(4) Y_{st} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{TBD}_{st} + \beta_2 \text{TBR}_{st} + \beta_3 \text{SEN}_{st} + \beta_4 \text{GOV}_{st} + \beta_5 \text{SINCRUN}_{st} + \beta_6 \text{GINCRUN}_{st} + \beta_7 \text{HINCRUN}_{st} + X_{st} + \eta_t + \gamma_s + \varepsilon_{st},$$

where variables are defined as in Equation 2.  $X$  is a vector of demographic characteristics.<sup>13</sup>

Regressions are now run separately by racial groups. Cells continue to be weighted by the number of districts in the state to examine the impact of Black candidates on turnout in the average district. Standard errors continue to be clustered at the state level.

### *III.E. National Election Studies Data*

While the CPS includes some demographic data, it does not contain information on respondents' political views or leanings nor on the respondents' experiences during the electoral season. In order to examine the impact of Black candidates on respondents of different political leanings, I turn to the National Election Studies (NES), a biennial survey of United States' residents of voting age. The major limitation of the NES is its small sample size—only one to two thousand respondents per survey year—with no oversampling of Black Americans. Because of the limited sample size, specifications focusing on Blacks prove uninformative.<sup>14</sup> Being unable to look at Black voting behavior by party is not a great handicap given that in partisan elections, 70 to 90 percent of the time, Black Americans cast their votes in favor of the Democratic candidate [McDermott 1998]. The small sample size of the NES also renders district level (rather than state level) analyses uninformative.<sup>15</sup> Hence I continue to run regressions of the form of Equation 4 using these data. The NES does allow for an examination of the impact of Black candidates on

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<sup>13</sup> Demographic characteristics are drawn from the November CPS.

<sup>14</sup> For this reason I use CPS data on percent Black and percent White in the population in the NES analyses. The remaining demographics are drawn from the NES.

<sup>15</sup> I can not even fill all of my White state cells using the NES where the number of White state/year cells falls to 340 from 500 in the CPS.

White voters, by voter party. Furthermore, the expanded political information allows for a variety of robustness checks to examine whether the Black candidate White voter turnout connection is explained by political views or election characteristics.

Finally, because the NES contacts respondents' election offices to verify their reported voting behavior, I can use the NES to demonstrate that overreporting, always a concern in voting surveys<sup>16</sup> does not appear to be driving the results of the next section: While White candidates are significantly more prone to falsely indicate that they have voted when there is a Black Republican on the ballot, the same is not true when faced with a Black Democratic candidate. My results indicate that only Black Democratic candidates are associated with increased voter turnout. Black voters show no significant correlation between false indications of having voted and race of the candidate on the ballot.<sup>17</sup> (See Appendix II for this analysis.)

#### IV. Results

##### *IV.A. Total Turnout*

Lublin and Tate [1995] show that turnout in mayoral elections is higher when there is a Black candidate on the ballot. In Table II, I demonstrate that Black candidates in higher level elections are also associated with increased turnout. In the top panel, I amend Equations 1, 2 and 4 to combine my independent variables of interest into a single variable summing all Blacks (of either party) running against non-Blacks. The first column of the table reflects district level results where each Black candidate on the ballot is associated with approximately a 1 percentage point increase in aggregate turnout. Given the need to aggregate to the state level for subsequent analyses, the next two columns investigate the extent to which the presence of Black candidates in other districts alters the column 1 finding. I add (column 2) to the basic specification an indicator for whether there is a Black running in a House election in another district in the state.

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<sup>16</sup> See for example Silver, Anderson, and Abramson [1986].

<sup>17</sup> While the CPS offers no voter verification study, Teixeira [1992] shows that aggregate voter turnout rates implied by these micro data are close to true voter turnout. Further the fact that White results are similar across the two datasets suggests that overreporting bias is not a problem in the CPS.

In column 3 the second independent variable of interest is the proportion of other districts in the state in which there is a Black candidate running for House. Neither measure of Black candidates in outside districts changes the coefficient on within district total Blacks. Clearly, voters are moved to the polls by Black candidates in their own districts. Point estimates indicate that they are also so moved by Black candidates in other districts. However, the effect is only significant when modeled as an indicator for other Blacks rather than as the proportion of other districts with Black candidates on the ballot. So while I cannot conclusively resolve the issue of whether Black candidates in district one increase turnout in district two, what is clear from Table II is that Black candidates in district one increase turnout in district one. This is crucial to keep in mind as we move to state level analyses.

The remaining columns of Table II demonstrate the robustness of the result when data are aggregated to the state level. Column 4 presents the results from a regression of the form of Equation 2. Black candidates are once again associated with a significant increase in total turnout, this time of 1.9 percentage points. Moving from official turnout data to survey data Black candidates continue to be associated with a 1-2 percentage point increase in aggregate turnout. However the result is imprecisely estimated in both the CPS and the NES.

The bottom panel of Table II investigates the extent to which the increased turnout is driven by Black candidates of each of the major parties. Column 1 continues to focus on the district level where we see that each Black Democratic candidate is associated with a 1.6 percentage point increase in voter turnout. Black Republican candidates appear to somewhat decrease turnout but that result is not significant. And as in panel A the district level result is robust to controls for Black candidates on the ballot in other districts within the same state. (See columns 2 and 3.)

Moving to state level data, the story remains the same. Black Democratic candidates drive the increased turnout. Both the returns data and the CPS show a significant increase in turnout (of 3.2 and 2.1 percentage points respectively) for each Black Democratic candidate on

the ballot. Both data sources also show an insignificant decrease in turnout associated with each Republican candidate. While neither Republican nor Democratic candidates produce significant increases in turnout in the NES, point estimates are twice as large for Black Democrats as for Black Republicans using that dataset. Black Democratic candidates in higher level elections are associated with an increase in voter turnout.

However, Black Republican candidates do not appear to have the same impact. This is potentially for two reasons. The first potential reason for Black Republicans' failure to increase turnout in the same manner as their Democratic counterparts is that Black Republican candidates have historically been less viable. From 1982 to 2000, in House elections, Black Democratic candidates won 88 percent of their elections while Black Republicans succeeded only 4 percent of the time. In the Senate Black Democrats were victorious 14 percent of the time and Black Republicans never. So perhaps based on history voters do not take Black Republican candidates as seriously.

A second potential reason for the differential impact of Black Democrats and Black Republicans on turnout concerns polarization. Once in office, Black legislators are more liberal than the average non-Black legislator, even controlling for party, according to rating scores tabulated by organizations such as the Americans for Democratic Action Committee and the American Conservative Union. Given that Democrats are rated far more liberally than Republicans, it is likely that when voters observe a Black Democrat running against a non-Black Republican they expect greater polarization between the two candidates than when they observe a Black Republican pitted against a non-Black Democrat. In Section IV.D, I investigate the extent to which party polarization can explain the increased turnout.

#### *IV.B. Turnout by Voter Race*

Which voters are increasing their ranks at the polls when there is a Black candidate on the ballot? Table III looks at that question by racial group. Results from a model of Equation 4 using CPS state level data indicate that each Black Democratic candidate is associated with a significant

2.3 percentage point increase in Black voter turnout (column 1) and a 2.2 percentage point increase in White voter turnout (column 2).<sup>18</sup> The Black Republican candidate results continue to be insignificant and in the case of White voters, negative. Given that Blacks and Whites comprise 10 and 82 percent, respectively, of the population in the average district, the numerical increase in White voters is about 8 times that of Black voters. Considering the magnitude with respect to the average district in which there is a Black candidate running, the White increase is still 1.7 times larger than that of Blacks.<sup>19,20</sup>

Results for Whites are robust to a change in dataset. The NES data show an increase of 4.1 percentage points (column 4) for each Black Democratic candidate on the ballot. The NES results for Black voters (column 3), however, are uninformative as the standard error on the variable of interest grows by more than 6 times. This growth is no doubt due to the small sample and cell sizes for the NES state level Black sample.

#### *IV.C. Turnout by Party*

Table III demonstrates a significant conditional correlation between Black Democratic candidates and increased Black and White voters' turnout. We know that the Blacks are most likely voting Democratic or in favor of the Black candidate [McDermott 1998]. The political leanings of the Whites motivated to the polls by the presence of a Black on the ballot are examined in Table IV.

The differential impact of Black candidates on turnout by party is examined by collapsing NES data to state/year/party cells and by expanding Equation 4 to include party dummies<sup>21</sup> and

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<sup>18</sup> The sample size differs slightly between the first two columns because there are 10 state/years in which the CPS sampled no Blacks.

<sup>19</sup> During the time period, the average district with positive total Blacks on the ballot is 33 percent Black and 59 percent White.

<sup>20</sup> Black candidates are more likely to run in districts with larger percentages of Black residents. Thus the average number of Black candidates in a state is an overestimate of the average White resident's exposure to Black candidates and an underestimate of the average Black resident's exposure. Recalculating the Black candidate variables to allow for weighting of House candidates by the proportion of the state's Black (or White) population yields CPS point estimates on Black Democratic candidates of .014 and .023 for Black and White voters respectively.

<sup>21</sup> About 1/3 of White voters in the NES identify as Democrat, 1/3 as Republican and 1/3 as Independent.

the interactions of the party variables with Black Democratic candidates on the ballot.<sup>22</sup> (Party is self-identified by respondents.) The results, presented in column 1 of Table IV, indicate that White Republicans increase turnout by a significant 5.2 percentage points when faced with a Black Democrat on the ballot. The increase amongst White Democrats—7.1 percentage points—is even larger and provides evidence to the contrary of previous findings that White Democrats abstain when faced with a Black Democratic candidate on the ballot. (See for example [Bositis 1998].) Independents show an insignificant decrease in turnout with each additional Black Democratic candidate on the ballot.

The column 1 results suggest that if White voters cast ballots along party lines then the increased turnout that Black Democrats draw is more greatly in support of their candidacies than against. However, as the remaining columns of the table indicate, White voters are less likely to support their party's candidate if that candidate is Black. The dependent variables in the vote choice analysis (columns 2 through 4) are drawn from questions that ask respondents shortly after the election to name the parties of the candidates that they chose for House, Senate and governor. The measure may be an overestimate of White voting for Black candidates as there is evidence that White voters are reluctant to tell surveyors that they are voting against Black candidates.<sup>23</sup> However the fact that there is no mention of race (or of candidate's names) may mitigate this reluctance.

I continue to collapse data to state/year/party cells limiting the analysis only to contested electoral contests and only to individuals who report casting ballots for major party candidates. I expand the model of Equation 4 to include interactions of both the Black Democratic and Black

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<sup>22</sup> The Black Republican candidates variable is eliminated in this model. Its elimination has no substantive impact on the estimation of the remaining coefficients.

<sup>23</sup> In 1982 when White Republican George Deukmejian ran against Black Democrat Tom Bradley for governor of California, Deukmejian's campaign manager said to a group of journalists, "If we are down only five points or less in the polls by election time, we're going to win. It's just a fact of life. If people are going to vote that way, they certainly are not going to announce it for a survey taker." The campaign manager was proved correct. Although exit interviews suggested that Bradley was "well ahead," George Deukmejian won the election [Pettigrew and Alston 1988].

Republican variables with the party of the White voter. A dummy for a vote for the Democratic candidate is used as the dependent variable.

White voters of all parties are significantly less likely to vote for the Democratic House candidate if that candidate is Black, say the results of column 2. While significant for voters of all parties, the effect is largest for Democratic voters, followed by Independents and then finally Republicans. There is no systematic relationship between Black Republican House candidates and voter choice in House elections.

For Senatorial elections (column 3), where unfortunately there is much less variation in candidate race, it is Republicans who are less likely to vote for their party's candidate when that candidate is Black. Independents and Republicans are 28 and 25 percentage points more likely, respectively, to vote for the Democratic candidate when the Republican candidate is Black.

And finally column 4 shows that both Democrats and Republicans are less likely to vote for their party's gubernatorial candidate if that candidate is Black. White Democrats are 20 percentage points less likely to vote for the Democratic candidate when s/he is Black. Symmetrically, White Republicans are 18 percentage points more likely to vote for the Democratic candidate when his/her opponent is Black. However, the small number of Black gubernatorial candidates in the sample means that this final analysis is suggestive at best. Nonetheless taken collectively the results of the vote choice analyses of columns 2 through 4 provide evidence that White voters' likelihood of voting for a candidate decreases when that candidate is Black.

#### *IV.D. Explanations for Increased Turnout*

To review, the basic result is that each Black Democratic candidate on the ballot is associated with an increase in both Black and White voter turnout of about 2 percentage points. The additional Whites who come to the polls when there is a Black Democrat on the ballot represent both of the major parties. However, White voters, again of both parties, show a decreased likelihood of voting for a major party candidate if that candidate is Black. But clearly



Black candidates are not distributed randomly throughout elections. We can not conclude that Black candidates *cause* an increase in voter turnout. This section focuses on explaining the Black candidate increased voter turnout link.

Because the methodology of this paper is an examination of differences-in-differences, fixed differences in state tastes for Black representation cannot explain the findings. However one potential explanation is that the results reflect concurrent trends in voting behavior and Blacks' seeking higher offices. Figure I demonstrates that this is not the case. The figure graphs the coefficients from a regression of Black (White) voter turnout on total Black Democrats on the ballot for five election cycles, from a two-election lead to a two-election lag.<sup>24</sup> Results for White voters are indicated by a dashed line. For White voters the evidence is quite compelling. Both lags and both leads show a small negative association between Black candidates and White turnout. There is a spike to a 3.4 percentage point increase in turnout in the contemporary period. For Black voters the evidence is less stark, but still refutes a simple trend explanation. In the pre-period the turnout response is negative and fairly flat before jumping to 2.4 percentage points in the contemporary period. One election cycle after the Black candidate appears on the ballot turnout is still somewhat elevated (1 percentage point)<sup>25</sup> before falling to zero on the second election cycle after the Black candidate runs.

While trends do not explain the basic results, there still remains the possibility of an omitted correlate of turnout and Black candidates driving the findings. Omitted variables related to voter attitudes, election characteristics or candidate characteristics could potentially be biasing results. Table V examines the robustness of turnout results to the inclusion of such variables. Because the additional variables are drawn from the NES, Table V only examines the robustness of the White turnout results. The table is divided horizontally into two panels. The bottom panel (panel B) shows the robustness checks. Coefficients for both the Black Democratic candidate

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<sup>24</sup> The figure includes the years 1982-1996.

<sup>25</sup> The increased turnout one election cycle later could be interpreted as evidence in support of the Gerber, Green, and Shacar [2003] contention that voting is habit forming.

variables and the potential omitted variable are shown. The sample size in Table V varies from column to column for two reasons: 1) The NES does not ask all questions in all years and 2) Not all respondents answer all questions. So for comparison, each cell in panel A provides the Black Democratic coefficient from a basic regression using the same sample as the robustness check below it.

One possibility is that the increased White turnout is explained by voter attitudes: either attitudes toward Blacks or Whites' own personal placement on the liberal/conservative spectrum. For example, a racial incident in an area could increase White voters' animosity toward Blacks, Blacks' propensity to run for office and the likelihood that voters of both races will head to the polls. However, the inclusion of such attitudes in columns 1 and 2 do not serve to substantially mitigate the Black Democrat coefficient. The attitude toward Blacks variable serves to decrease the Black Democrat coefficient by only 15 percent; the conservatism scale variable leaves the coefficient unchanged to the third decimal place.

Alternatively the increased turnout could be explained by an increase in knowledge or focus on the election. Perhaps the press gives more attention to Black candidates, particularly if the candidate would be the first Black to hold the particular office in the area. I examine this possibility by adding to the basic specification controls for 1) being contacted by a political party regarding the election; 2) being contacted by any organization regarding the election; 3) attending to media regarding the election; and 4) ability to recall at least one of the House candidate's in one's district. As shown in columns 3 to 6, all four of these measures of political information have a positive conditional correlation with voter turnout. The media and recall variables are significant predictors of voting. However none of these measures explains away the conditional correlation between Black candidates and White turnout. In fact all serve to slightly increase the magnitude of the Black candidate coefficient.

In the final column of Table V, I begin to examine how candidate characteristics—or in this case voters' perceptions of candidate characteristics—affect the Black candidate increased

turnout link. Black candidates are viewed by potential voters as being more liberal than identically described White candidates [McDermott 1998]. There is some basis for this belief as Black legislators are more liberal than the average non-Black legislator, even controlling for party, according to rating scores tabulated by organizations such as the Americans for Democratic Action Committee and the American Conservative Union. Thus when voters confront a Black Democratic candidate on their ballots they may believe that the ideological distance between the two major party candidates is greater than if the Democrats were fielding a non-Black. Thus voters may perceive a greater need to come out to vote because there is more at stake. The fact that a Black Republican candidate would not serve to increase such polarization may explain why Black Democratic, but not Republican, candidates increase turnout. While the NES does not ask respondents how liberal they believe House, Senate and gubernatorial candidates are, the study does ask respondents to rank each of the major parties on a liberal conservative scale from 1 to 7. Assuming that present day candidates would be factored into a respondent's assessment of the positioning of a major party, I construct a measure of perceived party polarization by taking the absolute value of the difference of a respondent's liberal/conservative rating of the two parties. The final column of Table V indicates that this variable is positively and significantly related to turnout. However, the inclusion of this indicator serves to mitigate the Black Democratic coefficient by only 12 percent. A difference—like the differences for the previous six specification checks—that is not statistically significant.<sup>26</sup> Admittedly, however, the polarization variable is quite crude. It is possible that a more precise measure of polarization could partially explain the conditional correlation between Black candidates and voter turnout.

In Table VI, I examine how the inclusion of other candidate characteristics into the model of Equation 4 impacts findings. Because these additional candidate characteristics are drawn from

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<sup>26</sup> In fact, controlling for the four potentially omitted variables that are missing for no more than one/state year of the 340 in which in which the NES surveyed Whites between 1982 and 2000, increases the Black Democratic coefficient from .041(.023) for the basic specification to .046(.024) for the robustness check specification.

the Associated Press Candidate Biographies and not from the NES, the specifications in Table VI make use of CPS data so that results for both Black and White voters may be shown.

The first candidate characteristic examined is incumbency status. In column 1 I run models of the form of Equation 4 in which I decompose the variables of interest into Black Democratic incumbents and non-incumbents. I do the same for Black Republican candidates. To differentiate general inexperience with Black representation from inexperience with a particular Black candidate, I further control for the years, since Reconstruction, that the state has been represented by Blacks in the Senate, governor's mansion and House of Representatives.<sup>27,28</sup> The results of column 1 show that while point estimates indicate that Blacks' turnout response is larger when there is an incumbent on the ballot as opposed to a non-incumbent (of either party) the differences are not statistically significant. However, column 5 results indicate that White voters respond differently to Black Democratic candidates depending on incumbency status. While White voters show a significant 3.1 percentage point increase for every Black Democratic non-incumbent on the ballot, they show a 3.4 percentage point decrease for each Black Democratic incumbent. The difference is statistically significant. There is not a statistically significant difference in White voters' response to Black Republican incumbents compared with Black Republican non-incumbents. These results suggest that if White voters are motivated to polls, even in part, by Black candidates' liberalness, this impetus seems to wear off once the candidate assumes office. However, these results are not robust to a change in dataset. In NES data, White voters show a significant larger positive turnout response to Black Democratic incumbents than to Black Democratic non-incumbents.

In the specifications of Columns 1 and 4 incumbency status may simply proxy for experience. In the final columns of Table VI, I investigate this possibility. These columns focus

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<sup>27</sup> Years of House representation by Blacks is normalized by the number of districts in the state in the current period.

<sup>28</sup> The years of service of Black Members of Congress are drawn from Amer [2001]. The years of service of Black governors come from the website of the National Governors Association ([www.nga.com](http://www.nga.com)).

entirely on Senate elections from 1988 to 2000. Such a focus was chosen because biographical information on more recent candidates is more readily available.<sup>29</sup> Further information on those running for Senate is also more available than on those running for House. The limitation of this focus is of course, the small number of Black candidates<sup>30</sup> used to identify the coefficient of interest.

Each Black Democratic senatorial candidate is associated with an increase in Black turnout of 2.9 percentage points (column 2) and in White turnout (column 6) of 4 percentage points. Only the White turnout response is significant. Black Republicans running for Senate have no impact on turnout of either Black or White voters. The remaining columns of the table examine how experience mitigates this relationship. In columns 3 and 7 the state level (gubernatorial or senatorial) experience of the candidates is controlled for. This addition does not change the relationship between Black senatorial candidates and either Black or White turnout substantially. In columns 4 and 8 controls for candidate House experience, education and military service are further added to the specification. Once again, results are robust to the additions. Further the results for Whites are robust to a change in dataset to the NES. If incumbency does in fact serve to mitigate the relationship between Black candidates and White turnout it is not due to a general experience effect. Rather if there is a differential impact of Black incumbents and non-incumbents the differential seems to be due to the specific experience of having held the particular position.

## V. Conclusion

There is much anecdotal evidence that Black candidates increase voter turnout. In some stories, Black Americans come to the polls in support. In others White Americans come out in opposition. I quantify the impact of Black candidates seeking election to the House of Representatives and higher offices. Black voter turnout increases by 2.3 percentage points for

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<sup>29</sup> The year restriction only eliminates one senatorial contest that includes a Black candidate.

<sup>30</sup> There are eleven Blacks senatorial candidates, seven of whom are Democrats, during the time period.

every Black Democrat on the ballot. White voter turnout increases by 2.2 percentage points, an increase that is numerically greater given the relative numbers of Whites and Blacks in the average district. The Whites who are propelled to the polls come from the ranks of both Democrats and Republicans. However both White Democrats and White Republicans have a reduced likelihood of voting for a major party candidate when that candidate is Black.

What explains this increased turnout? Candidate experience does not. Nor do voter attitudes. Nor does increased media, party or voter attention. Perhaps a perception of an extreme liberalness on the part of Black candidates is a factor. This is consistent with the increased turnout in response to Black Democratic but not Black Republican candidates. To further test this validity of this explanation, data on candidate ideology and on voters' perception thereof are needed. The collection and analysis of such data is the subject of future work.

APPENDIX I: CPS AND NES MEANS, BY RACE CELLS

Variable	<u>Blacks</u>		<u>Whites</u>	
	CPS	NES	CPS	NES
Percent voting	.55	.54	.61	.63
Percent married	.46	.31	.66	.57
Elementary	.10	.09	.07	.06
Some high school	.21	.15	.14	.10
High school	.33	.34	.34	.32
Some college	.24	.29	.24	.25
College	.11	.13	.21	.27
Family income ( in thousands of 2000 dollars)	30.3	35.0	44.8	49.2
Percent unemployed	.07	.08	.03	.03
Percent Black	.10	.11	.10	.10
Percent White	.82	.81	.82	.82
Total Blacks running in contested elections against non-Blacks	.11	.12	.11	.12
Total Black Democrats running in contested elections against non-Blacks	.08	.09	.08	.09
Total Black Republicans running in contested elections against non-Blacks	.03	.03	.03	.03
Number of state years	490/500	241/500	500/500	340/500

State/year cells are weighted by number of districts. Data are from the NES and CPS November files, 1982-2000.

APPENDIX II: IMPACT OF BLACK CANDIDATES ON VOTER OVERREPORTING, NES

	Black Respondents	White Respondents
Total Black Democrats running in contested elections	-.115	.035
against non-Blacks	(.091)	(.023)
Total Black Republicans running in contested elections	.003	.094***
against non-Blacks	(.097)	(.031)
Married	-.002	-.071**
	(.042)	(.014)
Unemployed	.123	.048
	(.113)	(.046)
Family Income	.000	.000
	(.001)	(.000)
<i>Education</i>		
Some high school	-.028	-.019
	(.06)	(.026)
High School	.014	-.014
	(.061)	(.022)
Some College	-.057	-.021
	(.073)	(.024)
College	-.137**	-.061***
	(.061)	(.024)
N	517	4050

Analyses cover the years 1984 to 1990, when the NES conducted voter verification surveys. Specifications include election characteristics and age, state and year dummies. Standard errors are adjusted for clustering at the state level. \*\*\*denotes significance at the 1 percent level, \*\* at the 5 percent level and \* at the 10 percent level.

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TABLE I  
NUMBER OF BLACK CANDIDATES BY ELECTION TYPE, 1982-2000 (EVEN YEARS ONLY)

Type of electoral contest	Number of such contests
<i>House of Representatives</i>	
(total N=435 districts*10 years) = 4350 elections	
Number of races with Black candidates	389
Number of contested races w/ Black candidate	335
Number of contested races w/ one Black candidate	239
Number of contested races w/one Black candidate who is a Republican	61
<i>Senate</i>	
(total N=333)	
Number of races w/Black candidate	12
Number of races w/one Black candidate	12
Number of races w/one Black candidate who is a Republican	5
<i>Governor</i>	
(total N=239)	
Number of races w/Black candidate	4
Number of races w/ one Black candidate	4
Number of races w/one Black candidate who is a Republican	1

All Senate and gubernatorial elections involving Black candidates are contested.

TABLE II  
IMPACT OF BLACK CANDIDATES ON VOTER TURNOUT

	<u>District level analysis</u>			<u>State level analysis</u>		
	Returns data	Returns data	Returns data	Returns data	CPS	NES
<b>Panel A</b>						
Total Blacks running in contested elections against non-Blacks	.009** (.004)	.009** (.004)	.009** (.004)	.019** (.009)	.010 (.007)	.022 (.019)
Indicator for a Black candidate in another district in the state		.013*** (.004)				
Proportion of other districts in state with Black candidates			.015 (.022)			
<b>Panel B</b>						
Total Black Democrats running in contested elections against non-Blacks	.016*** (.005)	.017*** (.005)	.017** (.005)	.032** (.007)	.021** (.007)	.026 (.026)
Total Black Republicans running in contested elections against non-Blacks	-.008 (.006)	-.007 (.006)	-.008 (.006)	-.013 (.011)	-.016 (.012)	.013 (.022)
Indicator for a Black candidate in another district in the state		.012*** (.004)	.013 (.022)			
Proportion of other districts in state with Black candidates						
N	4219/4350 district years	4219/4350 district years	4219/4350 district years	499/500 state years	500/500 state years	343/500 state years

Analyses include general elections years 1982-2000. Column 4 excludes Louisiana 1982. All specifications include controls for electoral contests on the ballot, incumbents seeking reelection and year dummies. District level analyses further include House race contested and district\*redistricting period dummies. State level analyses include state dummies as well as controls for percent married, percent unemployed, percent Black and percent White as well as education and income level controls. CPS demographics are used with the returns data in column 4. \*\*\*denotes significance at the 1 percent level, \*\* at the 5 percent level and \* at the 10 percent level.

TABLE III  
IMPACT OF BLACK CANDIDATES ON STATE VOTER TURNOUT, BY VOTER RACE

	<u>CPS</u>	<u>CPS</u>	<u>NES</u>	<u>NES</u>
	Black turnout	White turnout	Black turnout	White turnout
Total Black Democrats running in contested elections against non-Blacks	.023** (.012)	.022** (.007)	.074 (.073)	.041* (.023)
Total Black Republicans running in contested elections against non-Blacks	.002 (.016)	-.016 (.013)	-.038 (.085)	.004 (.031)
Number of state years	490/500	500/500	241/500	340/500

Analyses include general elections years 1982-2000. All specifications include percent married, percent unemployed, percent Black, percent White, and education, age, state and year dummies as well as controls for electoral contest on the ballot and incumbents seeking reelection. Standard errors are adjusted for clustering at the state level. \*\*\*denotes significance at the 1 percent level, \*\* at the 5 percent level and \* at the 10 percent level.

TABLE IV  
IMPACT OF BLACK CANDIDATES ON WHITE VOTER TURNOUT AND VOTE CHOICE,  
BY PARTY, NES

	Turnout	Voted for the Democratic Candidate for...		
		House	Senate	Governor
Total Black Democrats*Republican	.052** (.023)			
Total Black Democrats*Democrat	.071** (.032)			
Total Black Democrats*Independent	-.036 (.025)			
Black Democratic candidate*Republican		-.168* (.086)	-.048 (.038)	-.05 (.043)
Black Democratic candidate*Democratic		-.375** (.144)	-.008 (.109)	-.203** (.046)
Black Democratic candidate*Independent		-.251* (.123)	.089 (.098)	-.089* (.049)
Joint significance of above three coefficients, P>F		.000	.2	.000
Black Republican candidate*Republican		-.069 (.161)	.253** (.118)	.183** (.048)
Black Republican candidate*Democratic		.016 (.102)	.024 (.095)	.071 (.058)
Black Republican candidate*Independent		-.03 (.16)	.28*** (.054)	.099 (.074)
Joint significance of above three coefficients, P>F		.969	.000	.001
Number of state/year/party cells	990	884	614	344

Analyses include general elections years 1982-2000. All specifications include Republican and Democrat dummies, percent married, percent unemployed, percent Black, percent White, and education, age, state and year dummies. Column 1 specification further includes controls for electoral contests on the ballot and incumbents seeking reelection. Column 2-4 specifications, estimated only for state/years in which a contested election of the type occurred and only for cells in which there are respondents who voted on these contests, include dummies for whether the Republican and Democratic candidates are incumbents. For House elections the dummy for a Black candidate is replaced with proportion Black candidates in contested races; data for individuals voting in contested elections is collapsed to the state level for comparability with remaining columns. Standard errors are adjusted for clustering at the state level. \*\*\*denotes significance at the 1 percent level, \*\* at the 5 percent level and \* at the 10 percent level.

TABLE V  
EXPLAINING INCREASED WHITE VOTER TURNOUT  
ELECTORAL ENVIRONMENT CHARACTERISTICS, NES

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
<b>Panel A</b>							
Total Black Democrats	.041* (.023)	.043* (.024)	.041* (.023)	.05 (.031)	.04 (.037)	.041* (.023)	.041* (.023)
<b>Panel B</b>							
Total Black Democrats	.035 (.021)	.043* (.024)	.05* (.027)	.056* (.032)	.043 (.028)	.047** (.024)	.036* (.022)
Attitudes towards Blacks, higher is more positive (mean=62.6/97)	-.003 (.002)						
Conservatism scale, higher is more conservative (mean=4.36/7)		-.006 (.031)					
Party contact (mean=.26)			.102 (.086)				
Any contact (mean =.3)				.114 (.101)			
Watch/hear/read media regarding campaign (mean=.92)					.512*** (.179)		
Recall either House candidate (mean=.33)						.226*** (.066)	
Perceived polarization between parties (mean= 2.68/6)							.034* (.019)
Number of state years	340/500	336/500	340/500	303/500	219/500	340/500	339/500

Analyses include general elections years 1982-2000 with the exception of Column 4 (any contact variable not available for 1982) and Column 5 (media variable not available for 1988, 1990, 1994 and 1998). All specifications include percent married, percent unemployed, percent Black, percent White, election characteristics and education, age, state and year dummies. Standard errors are adjusted for clustering at the state level. \*\*\*denotes significance at the percent level, \*\* at the 5 percent level and at the \* 10 percent level.

TABLE VI  
EXPLAINING INCREASED VOTER TURNOUT  
CANDIDATE CHARACTERISTICS, CPS

	Black Turnout				White Turnout			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Total Black Democrat non-incumbents	.018 (.015)				.031*** (.008)			
Total Black Democrat incumbents	.044* (.026)				-.034** (.015)			
Test of equality of above two coefficients, P>F	.447				.001			
Total Black Republican non-incumbents	.004 (.015)				-.014 (.014)			
Total Black Republican incumbents	.027 (.105)				.037 (.147)			
Test of equality of above two coefficients, P>F	.821				.731			
Black Democratic Senate candidate		.029 (.022)	.029 (.022)	.024 (.026)		.04*** (.013)	.039*** (.012)	.04*** (.012)
Black Republican Senate candidate		.005 (.03)	.01 (.033)	-.006 (.05)		-.011 (.012)	-.014 (.011)	-.01 (.012)
Controls:								
Years of Black representation								
House	Yes				Yes			
Senate	Yes				Yes			
Governor	Yes				Yes			
Candidate Attributes								
State level experience			Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes
House experience				Yes				Yes
Education				Yes				Yes
Military service				Yes				Yes
Number of state years	490/500	344/350	339/350	332/350	500/500	350/350	345/350	338/350

All specifications include percent married, percent unemployed, percent Black, percent White, election characteristics and education, age, state and year dummies. Senate regressions estimated for the years 1988-2000. Standard errors are adjusted for clustering at the state level. \*\*\*denotes significance at the 1 percent level, \*\* at the 5 percent level and at the \* 10 percent level.



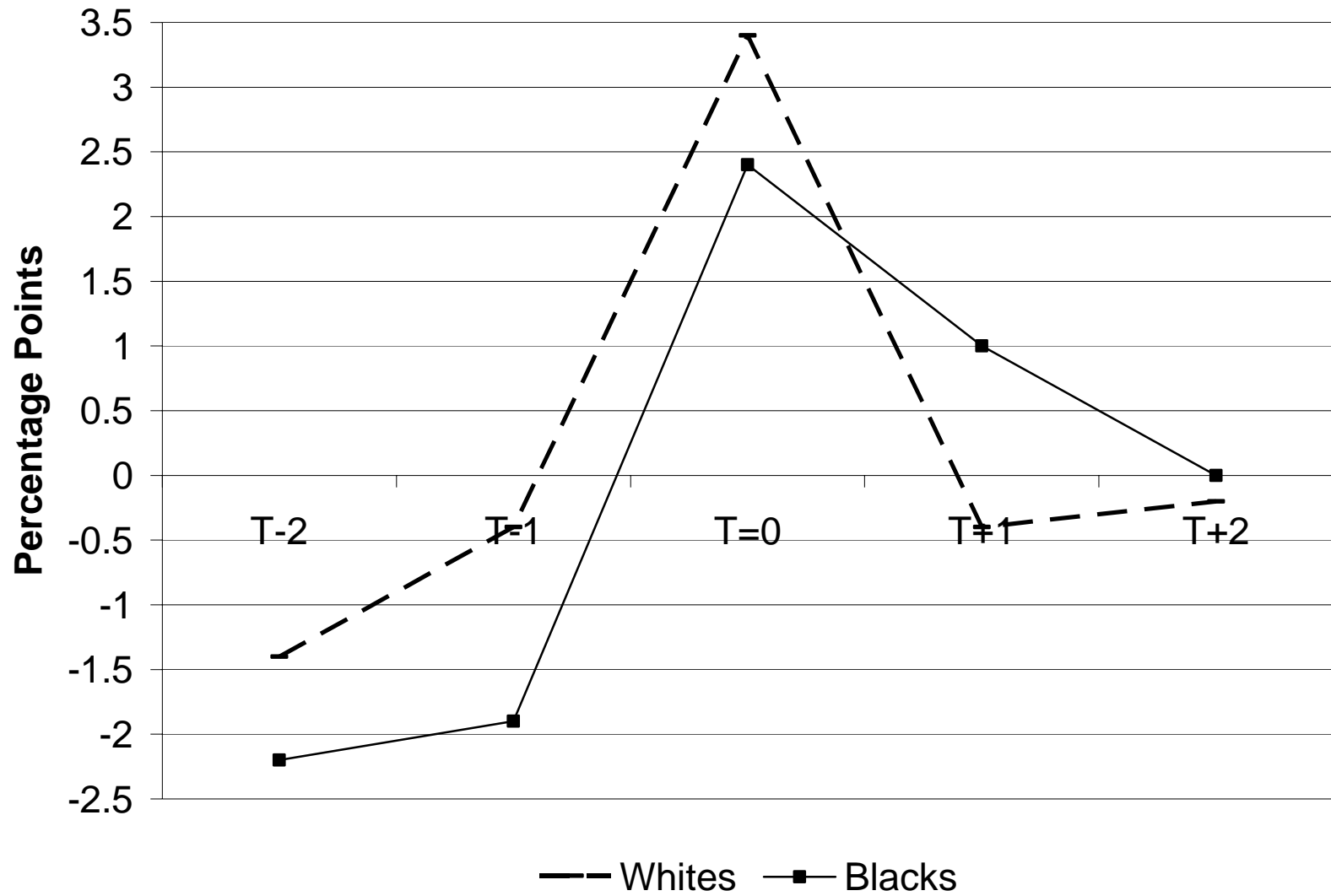


FIGURE I  
 LONGITUDINAL IMPACT OF BLACK DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATES ON VOTER TURNOUT, CPS  
 Analyses include general elections years 1982-1996.