Letter

Protecting the Right to Discriminate: The Second Great Migration and Racial Threat in the American West

TYLER T. RENY   *University of California, Los Angeles*
BENJAMIN J. NEWMAN   *University of California, Riverside*

Taking advantage of a unique event in American history, the Second Great Migration, we explore whether the rapid entry of African Americans into nearly exclusively White contexts triggered "racial threat" in White voting behavior in the state of California. Utilizing historical administrative data, we find that increasing proximity to previously White areas experiencing drastic Black population growth between 1940 to 1960 is associated with significant increases in aggregate White voter support for a highly racially-charged ballot measure, Proposition 14, which legally protected racial discrimination in housing. Importantly, we find that this result holds when restricting the analysis to all-White areas with high rates of residential tenure and low rates of White population growth. These latter findings indicate that this relationship materializes in contexts where a larger share of White voters were present during the treatment and exercised residential-choice before the treatment commenced, which is suggestive of a causal effect.

A substantial body of research in American politics explores the impact of "racial threat" (Key 1949) on White Americans' political attitudes and behavior. As summarized in prior scholarship (Enos 2016; Oliver 2010; Cho and Baer 2011; see Online Appendix A for an expanded review), this literature is beset with conflicting findings, with one of the primary contributing factors being the problem of selection bias. Indeed, this research typically analyzes the impact of the size of geographically proximate racial minority populations on Whites using observational data, limiting causal inference due to concerns over the non-random nature of minority settlement patterns and residential selection among Whites (Clark 1992). Prior scholarship has attempted to assuage these concerns by controlling for self-reported neighborhood racial preferences (Oliver and Wong 2003), performing endogeneity tests (Rocha and Espino 2009), demonstrating that racial orientations are not predictive of respondents' racial context (Branton and Jones 2005), and using instrumental variables (Acharya, Blackwell, and Sen 2016). Additionally, scholarship has attempted to bypass this issue altogether by using survey and field experiments (Glaser 2003; Enos 2014). A promising direction taken in recent research is the identification of events where large changes in minority populations occurred and characteristics of the event facilitate causal inference, typically by mitigating concerns about selection bias. Examples include the influx of African American evacuees from New Orleans into neighboring cities following Hurricane Katrina (Hopkins 2012) and the exodus of African American residents from Whites' neighborhoods following the demolition of public housing in Chicago (Enos 2016).

In this letter, we identify a previously overlooked event in American history that provides useful features for gaining insight on the effect of racial context on White voter behavior. Following the First Great Migration (1910-1930) of African Americans out of the American South to Northeastern cities (Gregory 2005), a second and larger exodus of African Americans out of the South (1941-1970) resulted in a massive and unprecedented migration to the American West—most notably to the state of California (Wilkerson 2011). Dubbed the Second Great Migration (SGM), this event provides a useful test of racial threat, as African Americans previously constituted an almost non-existent share of the California population. Residential choice among Anglo-Californians prior to the SGM occurred largely in the absence of Black residents, distinguishing this event from the vast majority of existing studies of racial threat where the Whites under study had long-standing contact with African Americans and residential decisions were made with regard to racial demographics (Freund 2007).

We leverage this historical event to evaluate the impact of proximity to areas undergoing rapid demographic change on White voting for Proposition 14, a California ballot proposition in the 1964 election that sought to exempt the real estate industry and homeowners from anti-discrimination laws (HoSang 2010). Applying theories of racial threat, we expect

proximity to rapidly diversifying cities to be associated with stronger support among White voters for Proposition 14. Because many Anglo-Californians in the early 1960s made housing decisions before this demographic shock took place, we have increased confidence that the SGM provides a rare test of racial threat that ameliorates concern over selection bias.

THE SECOND GREAT MIGRATION AND PROPOSITION 14

Throughout the early twentieth century, the African American population in California was small and concentrated in a handful of census tracts designated specifically for non-Whites. The 1940 decennial census, conducted immediately before the start of the SGM, indicates that African Americans comprised less than 2% of the state population and less than 3% of the population in urban counties that would come to house the largest Black populations. Holding aside the Black population, the non-Black minority population in California in 1940 was only 2.7%, leaving the state nearly 96% White.

The SGM drastically changed this, and represents one of the largest demographic shocks to White society in contemporary American history. By 1960, California's Black population grew by over 600% to approximately 885,000. In a number of cities, the Black population exploded: Berkeley, Emeryville, Richmond, and Vallejo all saw their Black populations expand by ten percentage points or more. In Compton, the Black population grew from *zero* to nearly 40 percent by 1960. Figure 1 displays the cities with the highest Black population growth. This population growth strained housing in the few Black neighborhoods throughout the state, increasing demand for housing in neighboring communities (HoSang 2010). As the Black community grew, political elites and homeowners sought to protect White communities from what they saw as a threat to home values and neighborhood identity (Lipsitz 1996). Together, these actors maintained racial exclusion through a variety of official and unofficial policies, leading to some of the most entrenched segregation in the nation (HoSang 2010).

The election of state legislator William Rumford (D) in 1949 and Governor Pat Brown (D) in 1958 aided in the passage of several anti-discrimination measures, precipitating the White backlash that culminated in Proposition 14. Real estate interests, politicians, and evangelical church leaders coordinated to collect signatures for a proposition to amend the state constitution, protecting what White residents believed was their right to discriminate. The measure, Proposition 14, passed 65 to 35 percent with overwhelming support from White Californians who, according to the CA Field Poll surveys, supported the measure by 3 to 1 (HoSang 2010). Less than one year after the passage of Proposition 14, the Watts Riot broke out in Los Angeles, which was one of the most destructive urban race riots in American history (Queally 2015).

In sum, 1940 to 1965 represents a pronounced period of racial change and conflict in the American West, and key features of the SGM afford a unique opportunity to assess the causal effect of racial threat on White voting behavior. First, the residential decisions of the study group (Whites) were largely made in the absence of the treatment group (African Americans). The interpretation of findings from prior observational studies of racial threat are often marred by concerns over selection bias; however, in the case of the SGM, residential decisions by Whites were made largely without consideration of the Black composition of their own or neighboring communities. Second, the migration of African Americans into California was rapid and concentrated in a few cities, increasing our confidence that the 1964 vote preceded much of the White flight that occurred between mid-1960 to 1980 following the Watts Riots, the overturning of Proposition 14 by the Supreme Court, and school desegregation (Schneider 2008). In short, we treat the rapid increase in California's Black population as a racially threatening "shock" to White society and a potentially important source of White support for Proposition 14.

EMPIRICAL STRATEGY AND DATA

As the SGM involved the drastic growth of Black populations in key areas throughout the state of California, our empirical strategy centers upon analyzing the effect of spatial proximity to Black growth cities on White support for Proposition 14. Theories of racial threat are rooted in Key's (1949) proposition that White political behavior in the American south was partly a consequence of the presence of African Americans in their communities. More recent work, however, argues that it is the *in-migration* and *growth* of an out-group that serves as a motivating shock to White political behavior (Green, Strolovitch, and Wong, 1998; Hopkins 2009; Newman 2013). Following this work, and that by Enos (2016), we conceptualize racial threat as the motivating effect on White political behavior of drastic changes in a spatially proximate Black population. Given that theories of racial threat argue that the psychological salience of a group is a function of its size and spatial proximity (Enos 2016), we conceptualize our "treatment" as the proximity of White voters to epicenters of Black population growth.

We constructed a dataset from historical administrative data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Office of the Secretary of State. The data is provided at the Census place (i.e., city) level, the finest level of aggregation we could acquire from historical sources. In total, our full dataset includes voting results for 392 cities in California. Because we are primarily interested in White voting behavior, we subset the data for our analyses to cities that were 90% or greater White (n = 340) in 1960. Our dependent variable is city-level vote for Proposition 14 (mean = 65.7%, sd = 10.6%) as reported by the 1964 California Secretary of State Supplement to the Statement of the Vote. Our key independent variable is city proximity to its nearest Black growth city. To

FIGURE 1.   Map of Rapidly Growing Black Cities 1940–1960
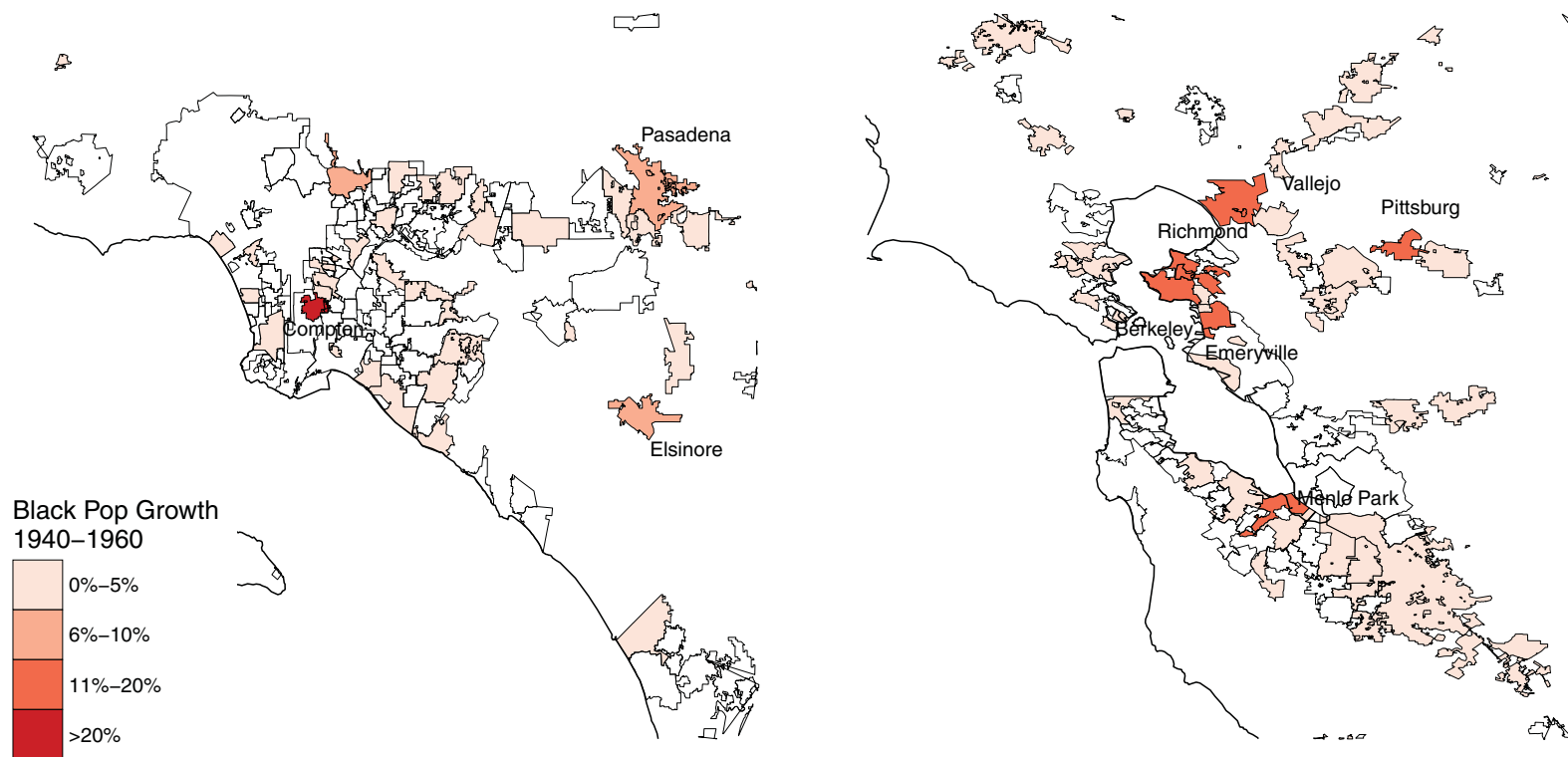
Note: City-level African American population growth 1940–1960 in Southern (panel A) and Northern (panel B) California. 98th percentile growth cities include Compton, Emeryville, Richmond, Vallejo, and Berkeley and additional 95th percentile growth cities of Pasadena, Elsinore, Menlo Park, Pittsburg. A map of the central valley, including 95th percentile growth cities of Bakersfield, Fowler, and Madera, is presented in Figure M.1.

TABLE 1.   The Effect of Proximity to Black Growth Areas on Support for Proposition 14

	Prop 14, 1964			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Proximity	5.94***	5.88***	36.06***	
	(0.80)	(1.46)	(12.33)	
Proximity Squared			35.14**	
			(14.94)	
Proximity Cubed			10.22**	
			(4.90)	
Log Proximity				10.85***
				(2.57)
Median Income		− 0.72	− 1.07	− 0.83
		(0.90)	(1.06)	(0.93)
Unemployment		− 6.53	− 10.31	− 5.62
		(31.61)	(34.28)	(31.23)
Homeownership		− 7.14	− 4.89	− 7.00
		(6.97)	(7.12)	(6.93)
Partisan Composition (%D)		1.49	− 3.79	0.33
		(5.86)	(6.95)	(5.90)
Population Density		0.01	0.01	0.01
		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Constant	70.69***	81.06***	89.64***	83.21***
	(0.84)	(7.81)	(10.45)	(8.21)
N	337	181	181	181
R^2	0.12	0.08	0.12	0.09
Adjusted R^2	0.12	0.05	0.08	0.06
Residual Std. Error	9.50 (df = 335)	9.74 (df = 174)	9.59 (df = 172)	9.68 (df = 174)
F Statistic	46.34*** (df = 1; 335)	2.63** (df = 6; 174)	2.98*** (df = 8; 172)	3.02*** (df = 6; 174)

Note: OLS coefficients with heteroskedastic robust standard errors in parentheses. 90% and greater White cities. Columns 1 and 2 assume linear relationship between proximity and city-level Proposition 14 vote. Columns 3 and 4 allow for non-linearity.
*$p < 0.1$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.01$ (two-tailed).

calculate this measure, we used city-level demographic estimates from the 1940 and 1960 U.S. Census files to calculate percentage point change in the Black population (mean = 1.17%, s.d. = 3.97%). Figure 1 displays the level of Black growth in cities throughout Southern and Northern California. We identified Black growth cities as those in the 98th percentile of Black population growth, capturing cities that experienced Black population growth between 10 and 40 percentage points over the twenty-year span, constructed a matrix of Euclidean distances between the centroids of all California cities, and defined proximity as the distance in miles from the *nearest* Black growth city (mean = -69.8, sd = 64). For ease of interpretation, we divide this variable by 100 and multiplied by -1, so that a unit increase indicates a 100-mile increase in proximity. By using a continuous treatment indicator on non-nested data, we bypass the concern in the racial threat literature over the sensitivity of results using multilevel data to the choice of administrative boundary (Tam Cho and Baer 2011; Voss 1996; for more discussion see Online Appendix B).

We gathered a number of additional control variables at the census tract level and merged them with our dataset via a weighted spatial join. We obtained 1964 voter registration figures for cities from the Berkeley School of Law Center for Research and control for city-level percent Democrat (of registered) to rule out

partisanship as a confounder. Measures of population density control for variation in geographic and population size of each city. As poorer and more racially conservative Whites might be more likely to live adjacent to high Black growth cities, we include controls for median income, home ownership, and unemployment (descriptive statistics are included in Online Appendix C).

RESULTS

We begin by estimating the bivariate relationship between proximity and city-level vote for Proposition 14 for cities with 90% or greater White population, the results of which are presented in column 1 of Table 1. The results indicate that proximity to cities with rapidly growing Black populations is associated with higher levels of White support for Proposition 14. The benefit of this analysis is that it maximizes statistical power, as the analyses including control variables have a reduced sample size due to the limited coverage of smaller cities in the 1960 decennial census.[1] As the relationship in column 1 could be driven by confounders, column 2 presents the results from a model including city-level

---

[1] The U.S. Census did not collect certain contextual variables for cities with fewer than 1,000 residents, an issue we address in Online Appendix E.

FIGURE 2. Effect of Proximity to Black Growth Areas on Support for Proposition 14
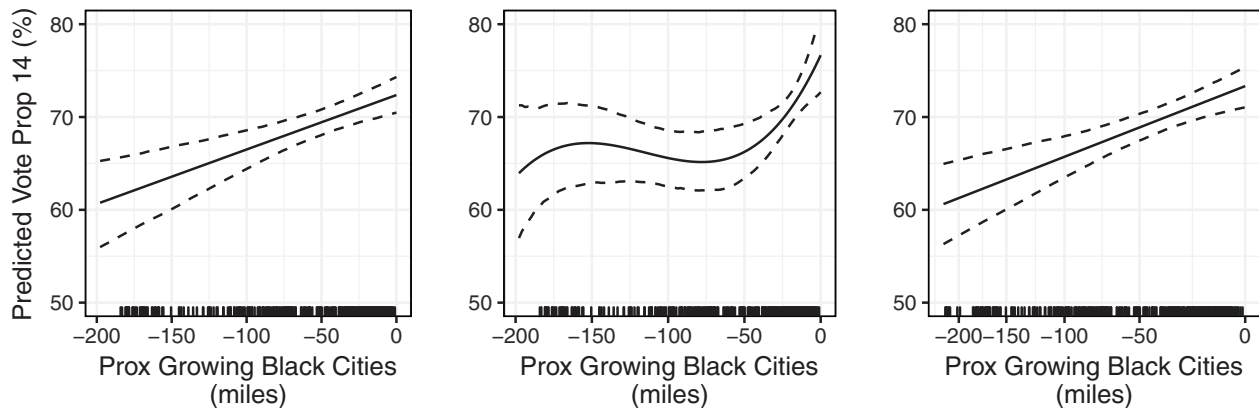
Note: Lines indicate predicted city-level Proposition 14 vote and 95% confidence interval moving from 200 (2 s.d. below mean) to zero miles from Black growth cities for models 2, 3, and 4 from Table 1. All other variables are set to their means.

control variables. As shown in column 2, the relationship between proximity to nearest Black growth city and support for Proposition 14 holds. To assess the robustness of these results when accounting for possible nonlinearity in the relationship between proximity and city-level voting for Proposition 14, we estimate a model including a squared and cubed proximity term (column 3) and logged proximity (column 4). While these results indicate a non-linear relationship between these two variables, it is difficult to compare the average impact of proximity across models. To do so we estimate predicted values and first-differences.

We plot predicted city-level Proposition 14 vote in Figure 2 for models 2 (panel 1), 3 (panel 2), and 4 (panel 3) from Table 1. In panel 1, holding all other variables at their means, we find that a city located adjacent to a Black growth city is estimated to support Proposition 14 at 72.4% (95% CI: [70.5%, 74.3%]), whereas estimated support in a city 200 miles away (mean − 2 s.d.) is 60.6% (95% CI: [56.1%, 65.1%]), a difference of 11.8 percentage points (95% CI: [6%, 17.2%]). Looking at panel 2, we find that the effect of proximity seems to be most pronounced in the first 75 miles. The effect of moving from a city 75 miles away to one adjacent to a Black growth city is 11.5 percentage points (95% CI: [5.4%, 18.1%]). The difference across the full range of proximities is only a slightly larger 12.7% (95% CI: [4.3%, 20.6%]). In panel 3, using logged proximity, we find an almost identical first difference of 12.6% (95% CI: [6.4%, 18.9%]). Because the effect of proximity is similar in all models, for ease of interpretation we will use the linear specification for the remaining models in the article.

ROBUSTNESS CHECKS

We demonstrate in the Online Appendix that our results hold when using beta regression (Table D.1) and

when including county-level fixed effects (Table D.2). Given our interest in the behavior of White voters, we demonstrate that our results hold when further restricting the analysis to cities that were 95% or greater White in 1960 (Table E.1), and when employing an ecological inference model to estimate support for Proposition 14 among White voters (Table F.1). Alternatively, our results hold when lifting the percent White sample restrictions (Table E.1). Additionally, our results hold when using different thresholds to define a "treatment" city (Table G.1) and when measuring proximity to Black growth cities using driving distances and times (Table G.2). To account for possible post-treatment bias, we demonstrate that our results hold when replacing our 1960 control variables with pre-treatment (i.e., before the SGM) variables derived from the 1940 Census (Table H.1). While column 1 of Table 1 demonstrates that our results hold when analyzing all predominantly White California cities, to further ensure that our results are not driven by the mid-to-large cities covered by the 1940 and 1960 Censuses, we demonstrate that the effect of proximity holds when analyzing the $n = 187$ smaller-sized cities not covered by these censuses (Table E.1). Next, as placebo tests, we demonstrate that the positive effect of proximity to Black growth cities is restricted to Proposition 14 and not observed when analyzing race-neutral propositions (Table I.1). Lastly, we uncover complementary results to those presented in Table 1 when analyzing individual-level survey data estimating White support for Proposition 14 as a function of Black population growth in respondents' counties of residence (Table J.1).

While the SGM and the 1964 election offer a case where selection bias is substantially reduced, such concern is not entirely removed. Black residents did not settle at random in California cities. Further, while "White flight" from California cities was most pronounced between mid-1960 to 1980 (Schneider 2008), it

FIGURE 3. Reanalysis by Residential Tenure, White Growth, and Housing Markets
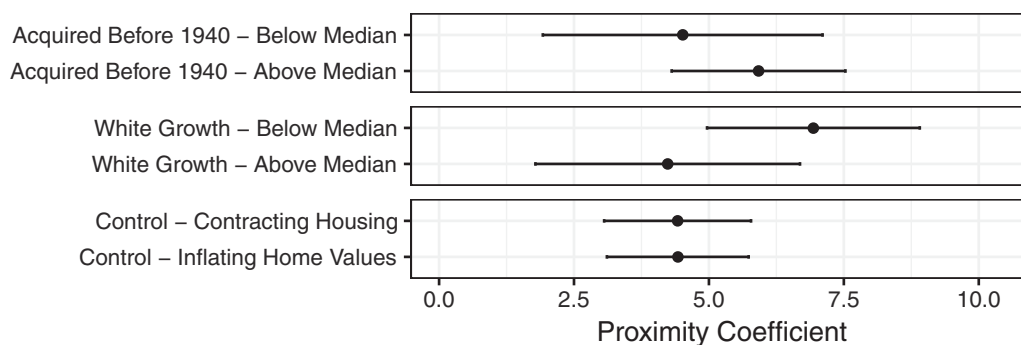
Note: OLS regression coefficients and heteroskedastic robust standard errors of proximity to Black growth cities. 90% or greater White cities. The first panel splits the sample at median percent of city residents who moved into their residence prior to 1940, the second splits the sample at median White growth (1940-1960), and the final controls for proximity to cities with the largest drop in housing availability or increase in home values. Full model results available in Appendix Table K.1.

is possible that substantial residential sorting occurred between 1940 to 1964. One method for addressing this possibility is to re-analyze our model among targeted subsamples of the data.

First, we explore whether our results hold when looking at White cities with *higher levels of White residential tenure*. The 1960 decennial census includes data on when individuals moved into their residence. Using this data, we can restrict our analysis to White cities where a higher rate of residents reported having moved in before 1940 (i.e., before the start of the SGM). The first row of results in Figure 3 (full results available in Table K.1) demonstrates that the effect of proximity to Black growth cities holds ($p < 0.01$) when looking at above-median tenure cities. This result is critical, as it indicates that when conducting a test reducing White residential selection bias, the estimated effect of proximity remains positive and statistically significant.

Second, we can assess whether our results hold when looking at majority-White cities with *lower levels of White population growth* between 1940–1960. Racially conservative Whites residing in cities experiencing Black in-migration may have fled to adjacent all-White cities, taking their racially threatened attitudes with them. Such a process could have induced the findings we observe, suggesting they are less due to the activation of racial threat among Whites residing in proximity to Black growth cities and due instead to the *migration* of racially threatened Whites to neighboring cities. While we find suggestive evidence that White populations contracted the most in cities within five miles of Black growth cities, we find no evidence that White population growth disproportionately occurred within neighboring cities five or more miles away from Black growth cities (see Figure L.1). Moreover, the results presented in Figure 3 belie this concern: rather than being endemic or more pronounced in White cities experiencing high White population growth, we find the effect of proximity to Black growth

cities is stronger in White cities with below median White growth (range: $[-17.2, -0.003]$, mean $= -2.2$).

It is also possible that "redlining" (Rothstein 2017) forced African Americans to settle in neighborhoods deemed less desirable, which may have contained poorer and more racially conservative Whites. Such possibility could explain the relationship we observe between proximity to Black growth cities and White support for Proposition 14. This possibility is not suggested by the data, as proximity to Black growth cities is not strongly correlated with pretreatment indicators of 1940 socioeconomic standing, such as median home values ($r = 0.10$), homeownership rates ($r = 0.15$), or unemployment rates ($r = 0.01$). Another concern is that our results are due to housing competition. It is possible that proximity to Black growth cities is capturing the effect of proximity to areas experiencing increased competition for housing. The bottom panel of Figure 3 display the coefficient for proximity to Black growth cities when adding a control variable for proximity to cities with the most drastic (95th percentile) contraction in available housing units (i.e., vacant units for sale or rent) between 1940–1960, or the most drastic increases in home values between 1940–1960. We find the effect of proximity holds in both models ($p < 0.001$), indicating that proximity to Black growth cities remains positive and significant when holding constant proximity to areas manifesting symptoms of housing competition.

CONCLUSION

Exploiting a large demographic shift during the SGM, we sidestep some of the concerns of existing observational research on racial threat and find evidence that White residential proximity to growing Black populations in California was positively associated with voting for Proposition 14 in the 1964 election. As such, our study makes a novel and compelling contribution to

the existing scholarship on the role of racial threat in shaping White political behavior. Remarkably, demographic change remains a politicized and salient issue fifty years after the referendum we study. As the nation continues to diversify, understanding the impact of these demographic shifts on the attitudes and behaviors of native-born residents is increasingly crucial to understanding national political trends writ large.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

To view supplementary material for this article, please visit https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055418000448

Replication materials can be found on Dataverse at: https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/UAQZRO.

REFERENCES

Acharya, Avidit, Matthew Blackwell, and Maya Sen. 2016. "The Political Legacy of American Slavery." *Journal of Politics* 78 (3): 621–41.

Branton, Regina P., and Bradford S. Jones. 2005. "Reexamining Racial Attitudes: The Conditional Relationship between Diversity and Socioeconomic Environment." *American Journal of Political Science* 49 (2): 359–72.

Clark, William A. V. 1992. "Residential Preferences and Residential Choices in a Multiethnic Context." *Demography* 29 (3): 451–66.

Enos, Ryan. D. 2014. "Causal Effect of Intergroup Contact on Exclusionary Attitudes." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111 (10): 3699–704.

Enos, Ryan D. 2016. "What the Demolition of Public Housing Teaches Us about the Impact of Racial Threat on Political Behavior." *American Journal of Political Science* 60 (1): 123–42.

Freund, David M. P. 2007. *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.

Glaser, James M. 2003. "Social Context and Inter-Group Political Attitudes: Experiments in Group Conflict Theory." *British Journal of Political Science* 33 (4): 607–20.

Green, Donald, Dara Z. Strolovitch, and Janelle Wong. 1998. "Defended Neighborhoods, Integration, and Racially Motivated Crime." *American Journal of Sociology* 104 (2): 372–403.

Gregory, James. 2005. *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Hopkins, Daniel J. 2009. "The Diversity Discount: When Increasing Ethnic and Racial Diversity Precents Tax Increases." *The Journal of Politics* 71(1): 160–77.

Hopkins, Daniel J. 2012. "Flooded Communities." *Political Research Quarterly* 65 (2): 443–59.

HoSang, Daniel. 2010. *Racial Propositions: Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar California*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Key, V. O. 1949. *Southern Politics: In State and Nation*. New York: Vintage Books.

Lipsitz, George. 1996. *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Newman, Benjamin J. 2013. "Acculturating Contexts and Anglo Opposition to Immigration in the United States." *American Journal of Political Science* 57 (2): 374–90.

Oliver, J. Eric. 2010. *The Paradoxes of Integration: Race, Neighborhood, and Civic Life in Multiethnic America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Oliver, J. Eric, and Janelle Wong. 2003. "Intergroup Prejudice in Multiethnic Settings." *American Journal of Political Science* 47 (4): 567.

Queally, James. 2015. "Watts Riots: Traffic stop was the spark that ignited days of destruction in L.A." Los Angeles Times. http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-watts-riots-explainer-20150715-htmlstory.html

Rocha, Rene, and Rodolfo Espino. 2009. "Racial Threat, Residential Segregation, and the Policy Attitudes of Anglos." *Political Research Quarterly* 62 (2): 415–26.

Rothstein, Richard. 2017. *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. London: Liverlight Publishing.

Schneider, Jack. 2008. "Escape from Los Angeles: White Flight from Los Angeles and Its Schools, 1960–1980." *Journal of Urban History* 34 (6): 995–1012.

Tam Cho, Wendy K., and Neil Baer. 2011. "Environmental Determinants of Racial Attitudes Redux: The Critical Decision Related to Operationalizing Context." *American Politics Research* 39 (2): 414–36.

Voss, D. Stephen. 1996. "Beyond Racial Threat: Failure of an Old Hypothesis in the New South." *Journal of Politics* 58 (4): 1156–70.

Wilkerson, Isabel. 2011. *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*. New York: Vintage Books.