Chapter 10 – Hunting for Old-Fashioned Racists in Kentucky

The state of Kentucky witnessed a strange anachronism in 1996. More than 40 years after the U.S. Supreme Court struck down "separate but equal" education, and long after *de jure* racial distinctions had fallen out of judicial favor, the state legislature asked voters to strip school segregation from their venerable constitution. "Are you in favor," a constitutional amendment asked, of removing "language requiring that separate schools for 'white' and 'colored' children be maintained?" The referendum also sought to revoke constitutional permission for poll taxes, a Jim Crow tool for disenfranchisement (Key 1984, chap. 27).

On its face this should have been a *pro forma* vote. The provisions had lost the force of law more than a generation ago, and the state lacks a tradition of "massive resistance" to racial integration.[1] Furthermore, no fringe groups mobilized to block the measure, and publicity leading up to the vote was minimal and entirely laudatory (Martin 1996). Political elites thus were stunned when a third of those voting, and majorities in five counties, rejected the change.[2]

The vote's actual impact was minimal, since constitutional amendments in Kentucky require only majority support (Miller 1994, 90). Less clear was the vote's significance for Southern politics. If a third of voters in a border state like Kentucky sympathized with blatantly racist Jim Crow symbolism, the broader implications for race relations would be troublesome indeed. The underlying racism of Southern whites would exceed the apprehensions of all but the region's most dire critics.

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[1] Indeed, Kentucky was one of the few Jim Crow states that took seriously the Supreme Court's command to integrate schools "with all deliberate speed"–only 41of the state's 108 counties still had segregated school systems by 1957 (Pettigrew 1957).

[2] The exact vote was 563,864 to 274,438, a vote of 67.3% in favor. The amendment lost in Clinton, Jackson, Laurel, Martin and Monroe counties (Associated Press 1996).

The election thus seemed particularly valuable for exploration of the white-backlash phenomenon. It promised an excellent chance to study geographical variation in "old-fashioned racism," a sentiment seldom tapped in contemporary surveys. It also seemed a valuable way to address one problem with the Louisiana and Georgia analyses, which is that both relied on electoral data filtered through political affiliations. This measure of racial conservatism, by contrast, should not be any more attractive to Republicans for partisan reasons.

Election news coverage gave reason to think most voters knew what they were doing (despite quotes from local officials blaming voter confusion). The bulk of journalistic commentary implied that the real cause was benighted racial attitudes in all-white rural counties. The Associated Press (1996) quoted a hair dresser from one apparently "segregationist" area as saying, "Clinton County is a racist county, to be honest with you." The county is almost entirely white and, she concluded, "I think they like it the way it is." Rev. Louis Coleman, head of the Justice Resource Center, sounded a word of caution about reading too much into the returns, but added meaningfully that he has "had complaints from some of the five counties" opposing the amendment. Coleman addressed the issue of interracial contact directly, saying he pitied children growing up in all-white counties because they would find adjusting to a diverse nation difficult. Early the next year, reporters stressed the overlap between pro-segregation voting and the failure of counties to shut down for Martin Luther King Day (Mead 1997). Certainly the implication was that Kentucky provided evidence contradicting the white-backlash logic.

The empirical analysis reported in this chapter is not so simple. Certainly it does not provide evidence for a white-backlash pattern. All-white counties rang up troublesome levels of opposition to the desegregation amendment. Whites in those counties wound up the most segregationist, even after I estimated voting behavior by race. However, an unexpected complication from the estimation stage makes these conclusions very tentative. My analysis shows that black voters endorsed

segregation at rates similar to their white peers, a stunning result that suggests most of the pro-segregation vote was unintentional. It is still possible to estimate how many whites in each county were real segregationists, and study variation in those figures–an analysis that once again contradicts the white-backlash hypothesis. But the research requires too many shaky assumptions to be definitive.

Voters Should Have Known What They Were Doing

Assessing the scope and pattern of lingering segregationist sentiment is usually quite difficult. Few political polls, and almost no survey on race relations, offer the detail necessary to explore geographical patterns (Voss, Gelman and King 1995, 101-108). Furthermore, most surveys have stopped gauging support for old-fashioned segregation; too few respondents were willing to embrace it (Kinder and Sanders 1996, 94-97; Schuman, Steeh and Bobo 1985, 216). Yet just because deviant racial attitudes have entered a "spiral of silence" does not mean they no longer exist. Evidence suggests that, aside from the many respondents who embrace negative racial stereotypes known to produce discrimination (Peffley, Hurwitz and Sniderman 1997, 35), still others deceive the interviewer about their racial attitudes (Kuklinski, Cobb and Gilens 1997, 340-45).

The paucity of evidence about "old-fashioned racism" in contemporary times explains why Kentucky's 1996 amendment is so valuable. The vote was over whether to remove vestigial Jim Crow provisions from the state constitution. These provisions, while not active law, offered nothing to African Americans. Even black voters given to militant or separationist sentiment are resistant to Old South symbolism.[3] Thus the 1996 election provides a rare example when we can assume how one portion of the electorate would have voted with full information. At the same time, whites who

[3] For example, in Louisiana, the statewide candidacies of former Klansman David Duke (who combined a racist history with a modern Republican campaign message) drew almost no black supporters. His black vote, even counting those who accidentally selected him, was as low as 1 percent, and almost certainly not more than 3 percent (Palmquist and Voss 1997, 14). We have little reason to think that Kentucky blacks find segregationist symbolism any more appealing.

pay lip service to integration in public-opinion polls might have revealed contrary sentiments once hidden in the voting booth. It seemed a valuable case.

The amendment did have problems, but they seemed ordinary. The wording, composed by professional attorneys with the state's legislative services office, was legalistic and confusing. Indeed, remove one word from the amendment and the meaning reverses. But semantic gymnastics in the voting booth, as Kentucky required, are the rule rather than the exception with ballot propositions (c.f., Baus and Ross 1968, 61; Butler and Ranney 1978a, 17; Cronin 1989, 208-209; Hahn and Kamieniecki 1987, 22; Lee 1978, 113; Magleby 1984, 118-20, 144). The Kentucky amendment operated in relative obscurity, with press coverage "thin and late," but that too is standard (c.f., Cronin 1989, 83).

To the extent Kentucky's referendum deviated from typical experience, the differences would tend to improve voter performance. Information costs for the measure were low. The 1996 Kentucky ballot contained no other amendments, initiatives or statutory referenda, so the burden was insufficient to induce "ballot fatigue" (Bowler, Donovan and Happ 1992). Nor did the amendment share the stage with any highly controversial items, so we have little reason to suspect that voters were particularly likely to ease the process by rejecting all measures summarily (c.f., Baus and Ross 1968, 61; Cronin 1989, 85).

The policy at issue was neither technical nor exceptionally complex, as is often the case with ballot measures (Helburn and Barnum 1978; Hensler and Hensler 1979; Scott and Nathan 1970). All voters needed to understand was that the amendment stripped old segregation provisions from the state constitution, and that they should vote for it if they favored that goal. Newspapers across the state printed voter guides that laid out the alternatives (e.g., *Lexington Herald-Leader* 1996).

In sum, Kentucky's 1996 constitutional amendment seemed a reasonable opportunity for studying geographical variation in racism. Certainly some voters were confused, but my supposition

was that fewer would have cast incorrect votes than usual with constitutional referenda, since the election was not distorted by complexity, manipulation, a crowded ballot, or high information costs. Furthermore, I could assume the "right answers" for a group of voters (African Americans) *a priori,* allowing a means to get at the proportion of "phantom segregationists" who had endorsed the old constitutional provisions unintentionally. These expectations proved overly optimistic, however.

Pulling the Hood Off Kentucky's Segregationists

Kentucky's high vote in favor of segregation stems from a combination of two sources: intentional support for racist symbolism, and voter error. The task I face is determining how heavily to blame each source. This is a difficult burden, because it requires estimating not only how people voted, but also how they *intended* to vote. The key to finding an answer is positing that all black votes for Jim Crow segregation were accidental, an assumption that seems virtually unassailable, and that the pattern of error among blacks tells us something about how many whites voted in error.

Gary King's (1997) solution to the ecological inference problem can estimate racial voting behavior accurately, so long as population figures and election returns are available at a low level of aggregation (Lublin and Voss 1997; Palmquist and Voss 1996). Precinct-level voting returns were readily available, but Kentucky stopped collecting racial registration data a year before the amendment vote, and subsequently rearranged numerous precincts. Even with King's method, identifying how blacks and whites voted in each precinct was no simple chore.[4]

Nevertheless, since the registration data were only a year old, matching registration and election

[4] Throughout the discussion, I write in the first person singular, but in fact the data were gathered and cleaned in collaboration with Penny Miller of the University of Kentucky. Only the writing and analysis are my sole effort (aside from incorporating suggestions from several helpful readers, especially Lee Sigelman).

Table 10-1: Incidental Black Support for Segregation, 1996

Homogeneous Precinct Analysis

COUNTY	PRECINCT	Total Registration	% Democrat	Black % of Registered Voters	Segregation Vote %
FAYETTE	A130 OAKWOOD	438	90.0	98.2	26.5
FAYETTE	A115 GREEN ACRES	532	87.9	98.1	37.7
JEFFERSON	N113 PRECINCT 113	635	86.7	97.8	29.5
FAYETTE	A109 DOUGLAS WASH	672	81.1	97.5	42.1
JEFFERSON	M132 PRECINCT 132	1,063	88.2	97.5	27.5
JEFFERSON	N112 PRECINCT 112	574	88.5	97.4	31.5
SIMPSON	D103 HARRISTOWN	416	95.0	97.4	9.3
JEFFERSON	N111 PRECINCT 111	652	86.5	96.9	31.1
JEFFERSON	M101 PRECINCT 101	465	87.7	96.8	22.1
JEFFERSON	N125 PRECINCT 125	381	90.4	96.6	36.8
CHRISTIAN	A104 STJOHN ACT BDLG	769	94.5	96.2	28.3
JEFFERSON	M106 PRECINCT 106	599	84.2	96.2	30.7
JEFFERSON	M107 PRECINCT 107	779	86.5	96.1	32.0
JEFFERSON	M103 PRECINCT 103	1,172	85.7	96.1	30.6
JEFFERSON	N122 PRECINCT 122	729	87.0	95.9	39.4
JEFFERSON	C105 PRECINCT 105	557	85.5	95.9	41.4
JEFFERSON	M110 PRECINCT 110	614	90.8	95.8	35.9
JEFFERSON	N109 PRECINCT 109	1,009	88.8	95.6	38.6
JEFFERSON	M104 PRECINCT 104	728	86.3	95.6	25.8
JEFFERSON	N108 PRECINCT 108	1,322	86.2	95.5	32.2
JEFFERSON	M129 PRECINCT 129	350	84.1	95.4	48.1
JEFFERSON	N119 PRECINCT 119	740	86.2	95.4	42.8
JEFFERSON	N118 PRECINCT 118	1,116	87.4	95.1	36.6
JEFFERSON	M102 PRECINCT 102	634	81.0	95.0	52.1
JEFFERSON	O103 PRECINCT 103	644	90.4	94.9	39.6
JEFFERSON	C110 PRECINCT 110	812	86.7	94.8	40.6
JEFFERSON	N107 PRECINCT 107	1,220	88.5	94.6	40.6

Note: The "segregationist vote" in these homogeneous precincts is not an estimate, but the actual opposition to the 1996 amendment. The % Democratic in each precinct was computed using all registered voters, not just those committed to a major party. This list only includes predominantly black precincts whose approximate 1996 racial breakdown could be confirmed with the county. The average segregation vote, for precincts more than 95% black, was 34.4%; the weighted average with Simpson County removed is 32.5%, just shy the overall statewide figure.

King's Ecological Inference Solution

	Without Covariates		*With Racial Density Covariate*	
	Segregation		**Segregation**	
Race	**Vote %**	**Std. Err.**	**Vote %**	**Std. Err.**
Whites	32.7	0.1	33.0	0.1
Blacks	32.7	1.2	29.4	2.4

Note: This "segregation vote," broken down by race for the entire state, was estimated using Gary King's solution to the ecological inference problem. It relies on distributional assumptions about how voting varies from precinct to precinct, but does not directly assume how whites or blacks voted, either in general or relative to each other.

statistics was not impossible. I tied the 1995 registration figures to the 1996 election results one county at a time (Kentucky has 120 counties). Occasionally a county's precincts lined up by name, with no significant changes in their composition apparent. More often, I had to collapse some precinct data to the level of towns or magisterial districts to ensure that the units were comparable. In a few cases I had to give up and treat the county as a single unit. The result was 1,905 reliable observations.[5]

Losing information about white voting through this matching procedure was acceptable, since Kentucky's black population is sufficiently small that estimating white behavior is easy. Losing information on black preferences was more serious, since so much hinges on how well I estimate the behavior of that small population. Therefore, the precinct history for heavily black areas was confirmed through follow-up calls to county registrars. I am confident that almost every major concentration of black voters in the state is identified properly.

I estimated statewide opposition to the amendment, broken down by race, using a simple version of King's method. My analysis immediately made clear that most, if not all, Kentucky voters could not have realized they were endorsing segregation or poll taxes. Estimated white support for segregation was 32.7% (standard error of 0.06). Estimated black support was 32.7% (standard error of 1.2)–exactly the same![6] I can confirm the extremely high level of support for segregation among

[5] King's method (1997, 149-51) is not distorted by using units of observation with highly varied populations. The quantities of interest that it generates are properly weighted by the number of voters in each areal unit. Magisterial districts are election units within the county, and often cover the same communities over time while precincts within those districts shift borders to accommodate administrative needs.

[6] The comparability of these two figures is in no sense required by King's approach (1997, 92-94). In fact, aside from using all known information about how voters must have behaved in each precinct, King's method only requires three assumptions: (1) that the process generating black and white rates resembles a bivariate normal distribution, truncated so that rates cannot fall below 0% or exceed 100%, (2) that aside from any covariates used to capture aggregation bias, each precinct's rates are mean independent of racial density, and (3) that, conditional on the precinct's racial makeup, voting in one precinct is independent of that in others. In fact, violating the latter two assumptions seldom will mess up EI estimates, thanks to the safeguards provided by the method of bounds. Using the diagnostics recommended by King (1997, chap. 9), I saw no sign that assumption 1 was violated.

African Americans by checking the vote within all-black precincts. As Table 10-1 reveals, these predominantly black precincts contained large numbers of phantom segregationists, voters who opposed the amendment faultily. Among precincts that were more than 95% black, the pro-segregation vote was just shy of that found statewide (an average of 32.5%, when weighted by the number of registered voters with one outlier removed).

These simple figures may seem to imply that no whites are racist, but I shy away from that interpretation. Leaving aside any racist whites who accidentally voted against segregation, aggregation bias probably skewed these basic estimates. The logic is straightforward: ecological analysis gives special weight to African-American voters in all-black neighborhoods (King 1997, 85-90); voters in all-black neighborhoods are lower in socioeconomic status than blacks in more diverse precincts (Massey and Denton 1993, chap. 5); voters with lower status err more frequently when voting for referenda (Cronin 1989, 66, 76-77). Thus the simple analysis would overestimate the number of black segregationists by borrowing strength from predominantly black precincts to help derive estimates for more diverse locales. An outlying all-black precinct, Harristown in Simpson County, strongly confirms this suspicion. Only 9% of voters in this mostly middle-class, well-educated black constituency opposed the amendment. Their low error rate may be more common in racially mixed precincts.

Fortunately (as discussed in more detail in Chapter 7), King's ecological inference technique allows the user to model how segregationist voting shifts among blacks as the racial composition of their precinct changes (King 1997, 168-183). If proportionally fewer blacks endorsed segregation in racially diverse areas, these more sensitive estimates can capture that pattern. My analysis indicates that blacks *were* significantly less likely to endorse segregation if they lived in whiter

locales.[7] Figure 10-1 shows how the segregation vote changed with black density. Each dot corresponds to a single precinct; a solid regression line highlights the trend. About 36.3% of African-American voters endorsed segregation in predominantly black precincts, as indicated where the line intersects with the far right side of the graph, but only about 31.8% did so in precincts where blacks formed half of the pool, and only 27.3% erred in almost all-white environments.[8]

This covariate analysis indirectly picks up a relationship between education and black errors (although it has the virtue of simultaneously capturing *all* of the socioeconomic traits that set all-black neighborhoods apart). Figure 10-2 shows how the estimated county segregation vote changed with black high-school graduation rates (where county figures are an average of the precinct-level point estimates, weighted by number of whites). Each dot corresponds to a single county; a solid regression line runs through these points to highlight the trend.[9] Although these results are only at the county level, a more educated populace fairly clearly results in declining voter error ($p < .02$ on the slope coefficient). An estimated 30.3% of blacks endorsed segregation in a county where only a quarter of black adults had a high-school education; the figure drops to about county where only

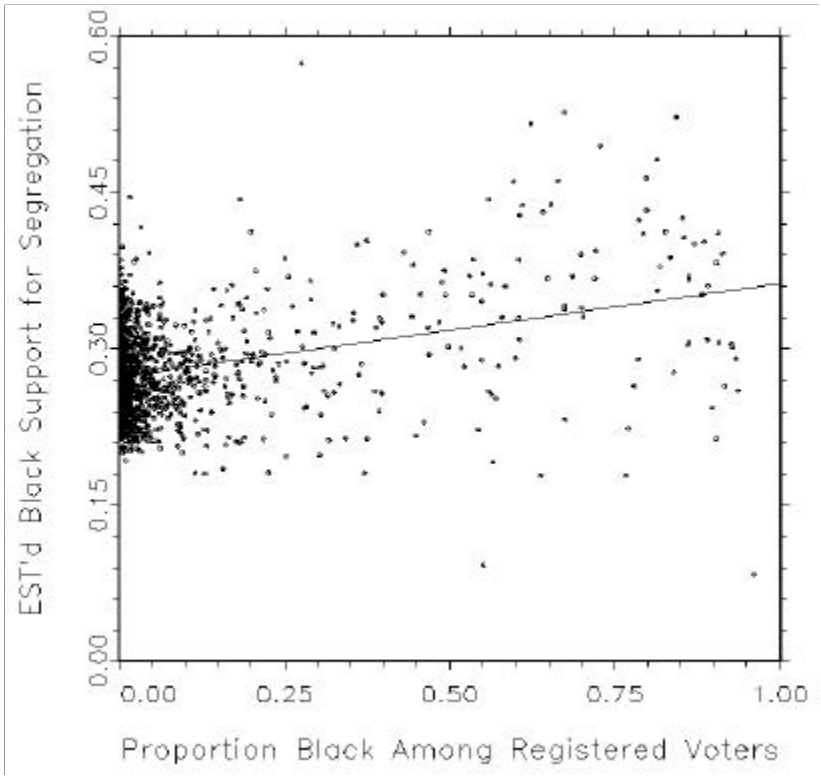
[7] I also tried letting the black vote shift with particular demographics, such as black per capita income and college and high-school graduation rates. Unfortunately, I did not have these census data at the precinct level, and so had to use the county-level figures as a proxy. Perhaps for that reason, racial density seemed to capture the aggregation bias more directly than these socioeconomic variables.

[8] My covariate analysis used relatively conservative priors on the extent of aggregation bias, and therefore did not differ as much from the simple analysis as it might have. I wanted to make sure the model was still borrowing sufficient strength from precincts with the most information. The conservative priors resulted in fairly reasonable precinct-level estimates. That is, white voting in mixed-race precincts tended to be within a standard error of white voting in a county's other precincts, whereas if we were overestimating the black segregation vote it is likely that variance within each county from white precincts to mixed precincts would have been larger. Looser priors on the level of bias did not take away the primary finding reported here, which is that an overwhelming number of blacks were phantom segregationists–no model I estimated, regardless of fit, ever managed to drop the proportion of blacks who were phantom segregationists below a fifth of those who voted on the amendment.

[9] The line is the result of a regression weighted by the black proportion of the voting-age population, so that counties with few blacks (which tend to have extremely high or low graduation rates) would not skew the slope. The regression's stats: constant of .316, slope of -.00056 ($t=2.51$), $n=109$ (because 11 counties have so few blacks no county education data are available on them), Root Mean Square Error of .04.

Figure 10-1: Aggregation Bias in Vote Estimates

Direct Bias (By Racial Density)



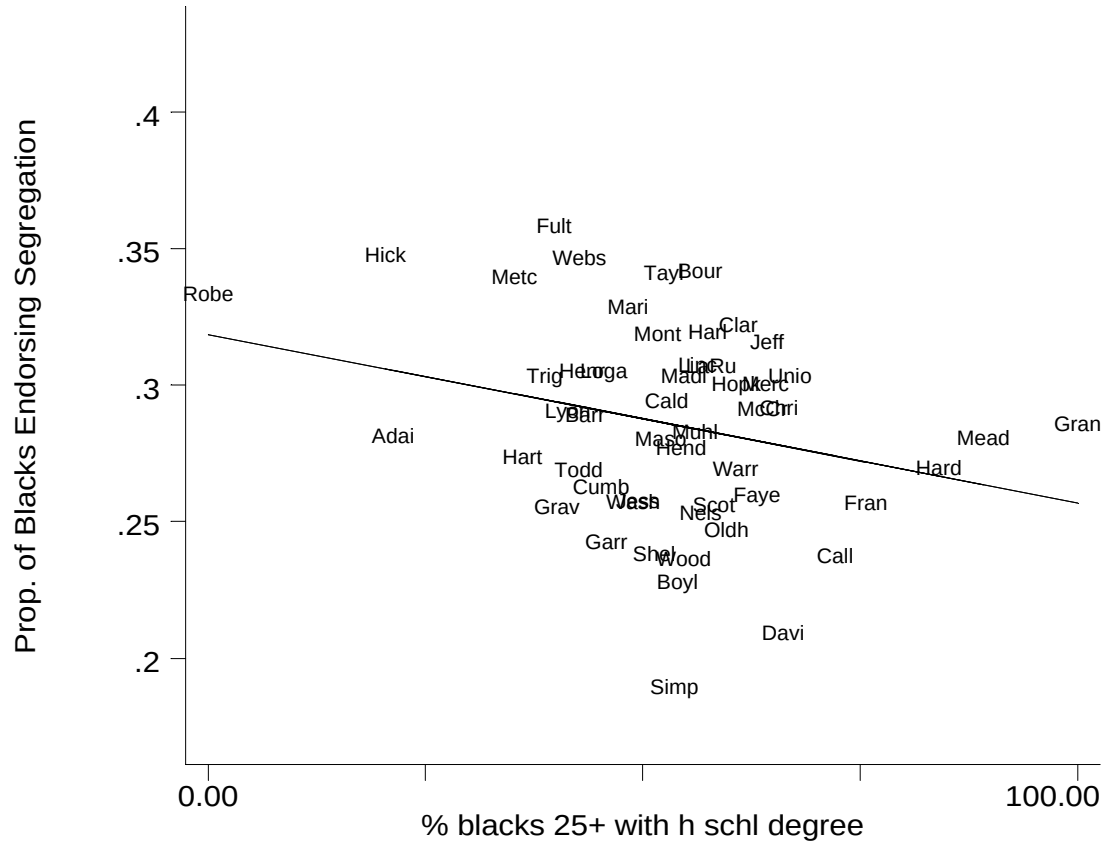
Note: Each dot represents one areal unit; the line portrays the linear trend as black density increases. Estimates were produced using King's EI.

a quarter county where only a quarter of black adults had a high-school education; the figure drops to about 27.2% if three-quarters of the black population reached that level. The statewide voting estimates, adjusted to reflect this aggregation bias, become 29.4% among blacks (standard error of 2.4) and 33% among whites (standard error of 0.1).

Estimating the County White Error Rate

Less clear is how many *whites* endorsed segregation accidentally. A simple approach, of course, is

Figure 10-2: Indirect Bias (By Black Education Rates)



Note: Each county is represented by the first four letters of its name. Some counties containing very few black residents were omitted. The black vote for segregation was estimated using Gary King's EI, aggregated up to the county level after an analysis based upon lower-level data.

merely to deduct the black error rate from the white segregation vote, and treat the difference (33–29.4 = 3.6 percentage points) as the intentional portion. This figure seems credible, but is not acceptable without additional probing. It neglects to account for inequalities in political resources across Kentucky–between whites and blacks, and also across whites in different counties.

Rather than presume that whites and blacks accidentally voted for segregation at equal rates, I made the more limited assumption that the white error rate varied with political resources in roughly the same way black error rates did. In other words, I wanted to base each county's estimated white error rate on the parallel black rate, but still allow white errors to be smaller given that population's greater average political resources. Operationalizing this idea naturally requires a series of assumptions, each of which is debatable and cannot be verified empirically. As a result, this re-estimation will contain a fair amount of noise–but the result is bound to improve upon the simpler presumption that whites erred as often as blacks. My approach was as follows:

(1) I regressed the estimated black vote for segregation on five county demographics, weighting for the black proportion among adults. Two of the explanatory variables were specific to the black population: per capita income and the proportion of adults 25 and older who graduated from high school.[10] The other three were general traits of the county that would inhibit errors, under the logic that political resources are partly contextual (Huckfeldt 1979; Kenny 1992): the level of urbanization, the proportion of the labor force that works in professional occupations, and the proportion of families with more than one worker. The results appear in Table 10-2. They fit the data moderately well (R^2= .22 and Root MSE= .033), and four variables work in the logical direction.

[10] Adding the black unemployment rate and college graduation rate contributed nothing to the model. I also tried a series of other census county demographics, sometimes admittedly with tenuous theoretical justification (not too problematic since this is a forecasting model rather than a causal model), but they also contributed nothing.

Table 10-2: County-Level Model of the Black Segregation Vote

Explanatory Variable	Expected Sign	Coefficient (t-stat)	p Value
% high-school grads, blacks 25+ years old	(–)	–.0004 (–1.3)	.21
Black per capita income (thou.)	(–)	–.0028 (–1.1)	.29
% population urban	(–)	.0002 (1.7)	.09
% professional of labor force	(–)	–.0015 (–1.4)	.15
% families with 2 workers	(–)	–.0019 (–3.3)	.00
Intercept		0.4426 (14.5)	.00
observations		109	
R^2 (adjusted)		.223 (.184)	
Root MSE		.033	

Note: The black vote for segregation, a proportion, was estimated using Gary King's solution to the ecological inference problem. The regression was weighted by the black percentage of voting-age county residents, which resulted in more accurate within-sample predictions than other possible weighting schemes we tried. Coefficients are reported with four digits because of the dependent variable's small scale; t-statistics appear in parentheses rather than standard errors for the same reason. Multicollinearity keeps standard errors relatively large in the model, but jointly the demographic variables allow a moderate fit with the data, as illustrated by the R^2 and root mean square error–which is what matters for forecasting purposes.

(2) I then computed predicted white error rates by plugging white county values into the regression coefficients from the previous step. That is, I computed predicted values for each county only after substituting white high-school graduation rates and per capita income for the parallel black measures.

(3) Next, I adjusted these predictions slightly based upon the size of the county residual from the regression, since the fit of the model was weak. The residual for blacks certainly tells us a little about how a county's whites will deviate from the model's typical forecast, but the comparability would be limited, especially where the black figure was computed for a very small number of people. So I weighted the adjustment by the proportion of voters who were black. A county with almost no blacks would get the prediction straight from the model, whereas one with an estimated 10% black electorate would be adjusted by a tenth of the residual. This method is of course arbitrary–I don't really know how much information about white residuals is contained in the black residuals. Yet it is almost certainly better than the two extreme, but simpler, options: (a) ignoring the information completely, and using the prediction straight from the model everywhere, or (b) adjusting the white estimate by the county's entire residual from the black model.

(4) Finally, I deducted the error estimate for each county from the white segregation estimate for each county, to produce our best guess for the proportion of white voters who intended to back segregation. An average of these numbers, weighted by the number of whites, produces the statewide figure.

I estimate, after these adjustments, that 6.4% of whites statewide intentionally voted to keep segregation in the Kentucky constitution.[11] This estimate still does not consider that some racist whites may have accidentally voted *against* segregation. I prefer to assume that error rates are

[11] In several counties we do estimate that a fifth of white voters intentionally supported segregation. Given the poor fit of our model predicting black error rates, though, we hesitate to place much weight on particular county estimates. We could be right on average but way off for any one county.

almost entirely one-sided, for several reasons. First, voters usually oppose a proposition when they are in doubt about its meaning (Baus and Ross 1968, 61). Second, the amendment contained the word "tax," and that probably pushed confused voters to oppose it. Third, assuming that the error rate is equivalent in both directions would result in preposterous county-level findings. For example, it would indicate that the five counties with a majority endorsing segregation actually intended to give much stronger support than they did. However, we can consider the effect of assuming that white racists erred at the same rate as tolerant whites. Using the computation explained in Appendix 10A, my estimate of the proportion supporting segregation intentionally would be: (.33–.266)/(1–2*.266) = 13.7. Even this unduly pessimistic approach would mean that only 13.7% of Kentucky's white voters intended to support segregation, still fewer than did so accidentally.[12]

A Quick Test for the Backlash Pattern

At this point it seems clear that most of the amendment opposition came from "phantom segregationists," black and white voters who do not endorse legally enforced segregation yet voted for it accidentally. These numbers are so large that any attempt to study the intentional support for old-fashioned segregationist policies will require broad assumptions that cannot be tested or falsified–the acceptance of which hinges entirely upon judgments of plausibility. Faulty voting plays such a significant role in these data, and my model to predict error rates misses so much of the county-by-county variation, that I cannot be confident most of the remaining variance captures true geographical differences in segregationist support.

I have opted to include an analysis here anyway, using the assumptions outlined in the previous section, for two reasons. First, the assumptions do not grapple directly with the relationship between

[12] Naturally one could push this number even higher. Contrary to my justifiable supposition that people vote against what they do not understand, one could assume that racist whites are more ignorant and therefore erred at higher rates than tolerant whites. Only plausibility stops the analyst from taking this to the extreme, and simply assuming that all whites either voted for segregation or wanted to do so–no data available can prove otherwise.

community racial density and segregationist sentiment–that is, with the white backlash phenomenon itself–and therefore do not "stack the deck" in any direct sense. And second, a systematic analysis with the assumptions and methods clearly identified does not require the reader to accept my judgment of plausibility; substituting alternative assumptions and assessing their impact becomes possible. The analysis looks at two areal units: the precinct, and the county. Precincts serve as a proxy for neighborhoods in the electoral data, and do not permit a complex exploration because demographic data are not available. Counties are politically more significant, and allow a richer analysis.

The EI estimates I eventually settled on using, those reported at the bottom of Table 10-1 omitting a covariate, did not permit the white segregationist vote to change systematically with black density (aside from what the method of bounds mandated). However, I did run a version of the analysis that would have allowed such a pattern to emerge, and it turned up nothing. Thus no white-backlash pattern appears at the precinct level. The precinct-level pattern is not necessarily the most interesting, though. School districts almost uniformly cover more than a single precinct, so if support for segregation linked to real exposure then it would operate at a higher level.

Furthermore, as in most Southern states (Glaser 1994, 25-26), the county is Kentucky's most important geographical unit. People often refer to their homes by county, rather than by city or township, and operate in social and economic circles that are bounded by the county. Local governmental policy often emerges from county governments, rather than town governments. If racial competition caused by proximity were going to express itself in referendum voting behavior, that backlash effect probably would operate at the county level.

White voters in the average Kentucky county included 11.4% segregationists, according to my estimates. Figures reached as high as 23.7%, which seems rather large, but not so large that I can reject it *a priori* given opposition to fully integrated schools as expressed in 1980s surveys (e.g.,

Schuman, Steeh and Bobo 1985, 78; Smith 1981, 563). Three counties did wind up with negative estimates of intentional opposition, which naturally are impossible. These unrealistic figures are a troubling reminder that my county figures are imperfect. On the other hand, in none of those counties did the estimated rate of support drop as much as 2 percentage points below zero, which means possible values were well within a standard error.[13] That the results were all within range of feasible values, aside from the original ecological inference error, raises my confidence in the informal method of gauging intent.[14]

I began with a simple, bivariate regression of intentional segregationist support on black density among the voting-age population (see Table 10-3, Model A). Black density has a statistically significant effect, but in the opposite direction of that implied by the white-backlash logic. Whites seemed to endorse segregation at lower rates in counties with a greater black population. Increasing black density two standard deviations (i.e., roughly 8 percentage points) on average corresponded with a drop in estimated segregationist sentiment of 3.3 percentage points. Much of the variation in amendment voting remains unexplained.

Model B includes one additional variable, the racial density measure squared, which allows a bend in the estimated relationship. It indicates that support for segregation stops dropping when the black voting-age population reaches higher levels, a result that is not quite statistically significant at the 5% level. Model C, which adds a cube term and therefore permits a second bend, suggests that

[13] King's (1997, 150) approach offers measures of uncertainty for individual precincts, as well as a method of aggregating those figures up to quantities of interest (such as county estimates). Obviously these county-level measures of uncertainty are imperfect in this case, since they only apply to my estimate of white segregationist support–they do not capture the additional uncertainty that comes in with trying to guess *intent.* Nevertheless, I repeated each regression reported in this section weighting by the county-level uncertainty estimate, following Burden and Kimball (1998, 539). These regressions never produced results substantively different from the OLS versions, so the latter are reported here.

[14] Rather than ignore that three values were impossible, I adjusted those counties in the data set so that they were treated as having no intentional segregationist sentiment (value of 0).

Table 10-3: Predicting the County-Level Vote for Segregation

Dependent variable: the estimated white % intentionally endorsing segregation.

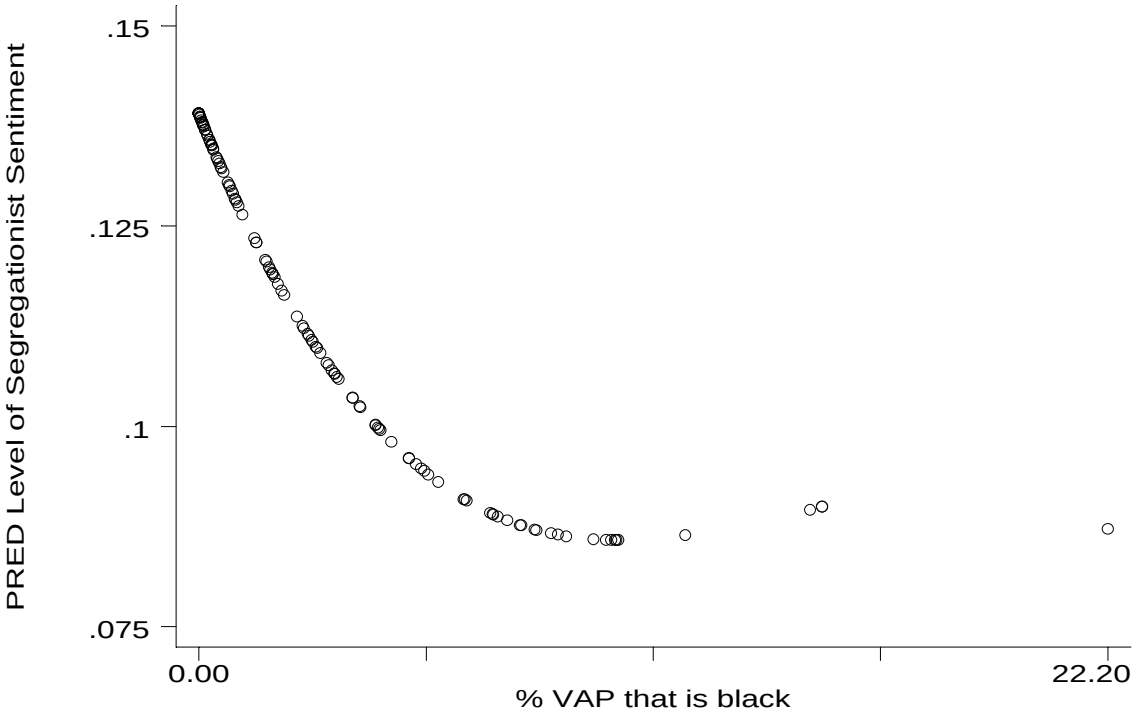
Explanatory Variable	Model A	Model B	Model C	Model D	Model E
% black among voting-age pop.	–.42 (.12)	–.90 (.28)	–1.28 (.57)	.14 (.20)	–.62 (–1.3)
% black VAP squared		.03 (.01)	.10 (.08)		.04 (.02)
% black VAP cubed			–.002 (.003)		
% population urban					–.10 (.02)
Interaction: % urban * % black VAP				–.010 (.003)	
% high-school grads, whites 25+ years old					–.05 (.12)
White per capita income (thou.)					.39 (.60)
% whites in labor force unemployed					–.37 (.17)
% whites who came of age pre-VRA					.20 (.09)
% population born in the South					–.04 (.09)
Intercept	12.8 (.64)	13.6 (.74)	13.9 (.84)	12.3 (.64)	18.9 (12.0)
observations	120	120	120	120	120
R^2	0.09	0.12	0.12	0.18	0.42
Root MSE	5.2	5.2	5.2	5.0	4.3

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variable computed informally from EI estimates.

amendment opposition never increases significantly with black density at any point. Figure 10-3 shows graphically how estimated segregationist sentiment changes, on average, as black density changes. Unless my estimates of intent are quite far from the truth, and the white error rate was in fact enormously larger in all-white counties than in those with a black population, no backlash phenomenon produced these voting results.

It is worth considering one other simple model before moving to a multivariate analysis. The Cultural Backlash approach to racial politics suggests that levels of racial conservatism will respond to black density differently depending upon whether a county is urban. Metropolitan areas are

Figure 10-3: A Mirror-Image of the Backlash Pattern



Note: Each county appears as a circle in the graph. The X-axis reports the black percentage of county's voting-age population, as reported with the 1990 census. The Y-axis indicates the estimated proportion of whites who intended to keep segregation in the state constitution. White opposition to the desegregation amendment was estimated using Gary King's EI. See the text for a description of the adjustments made to capture intent.

especially unlikely to follow a white-backlash pattern because suburban dwellers, who tend to have few black neighbors, nevertheless hold the greatest investment in racial conflict as it plays out in contemporary politics. Model D tests this idea for the Kentucky data by adding to the bivariate Model A an interaction term: black density multiplied by the percentage of a county's population that is urban. This variable allows a slope shift, so that the effect of racial density can change with urbanization. The results are consistent with the interpretation offered for Louisiana (see Chapter 8). In the most rural counties, increasing black density on average produces greater support for segregation, although this pattern is so weak that it does not warrant confidence. As counties become increasingly urbanized, however, the effect of black density diverges increasingly from what the white-backlash hypothesis would predict. Among the most urban counties, the model estimates that support for desegregation among whites increases almost step-for-step with changes in racial density. This finding is suggestive, but because of the imprecise nature of my dependent variable, I will leave out the interaction term elsewhere.

The previous four models still leave out other determinants of voting. A multivariate analysis is important not only to reduce omitted variable bias, and therefore get closer to the direct influence of racial density, but also to capture residual sources of white error. Some of the county-level controls, in other words, should increase confidence that white voter error does not govern too much of the variation that remains for black density to explain. For the multivariate Model E, I settled on the following control variables:

- Percent Urban–City dwellers historically have been more tolerant of racial minorities than those who live in rural areas (Black 1973). The level of urbanization also might capture variation in socioeconomic status missed by the overt SES measures used.
- White Per Capita Income: Wealthier whites are less likely to feel the pinch of intergroup economic competition, and more likely to be able to pull their children from integrated schools,

so they have less incentive to support segregation. They also may have greater political resources, and therefore be less likely to vote in error.

- Percent of Older Whites: Whites who came of age before the Voting Rights Act of 1965 probably grew up in an environment where African Americans faced more prejudice than they do today, especially in the South (Beck 1977). The greatest push to integrate Southern schools also took place around that time. So counties with an older population might be less likely to support stripping segregation from the constitution.
- Percent Southern: Voters born in the South may be less likely to oppose Jim Crow symbolism. Counts natives of Kentucky, plus those born in the 11 former Confederate states, as Southern.
- Percent of Whites Who Graduated from High School: Education supposedly instills tolerance, at least toward minority groups (Bobo and Licari 1989; Kinder and Mendelberg 1995, 410). It also increases the likelihood that voters would be able to process the confusing ballot wording.
- White Unemployment Percentage: Racial conflict purportedly increases when times get tough (Howell 1994, 193). This makes the most sense if polarization springs primarily from economic competition, although stress could heighten bad feelings of any sort. Whites in counties where jobs are tight for those in the labor force also may lack political resources that those in more comfortable counties enjoy.

This model is fairly similar to that used by Giles and Buckner (1993) to study white backlash in Louisiana. Aside from the quadratic term for racial density, the only important difference is that the Southern percentage is among all adults, not just whites. These variables aggregate at the county level, even though their logic operates in part (but only in part) at the individual level, raising the specter of an "ecological fallacy." However, the variables operate only as controls, and therefore

do not pose a problem. I am not interested in determining how rich voters differ from poor, how older voters differ from younger, or urban voters differ from rural–as long as I capture how county voting varied, *ceteris paribus*, as those groups became a larger or smaller proportion of the population. To put it another way, the only individual-level hypothesis of interest is how white voters differed from black ones, so race is the only demographic that required a more sophisticated use of ecological inference. The other variables honestly are contextual, such that I would not hunt down individual-level measures even if they were available.

The Model E results are not identical to those from the previous models.[15] Estimated support for segregation does not drop as quickly as racial density climbs, compared to Model B (–.006 vs. –.009), and the trend levels off a bit more sharply as a result. The county's urbanization, plus the age and unemployment rate of its white population, all help predict variation in the vote to a statistically significant extent. The average error drops by about a percentage point (Root Mean Square Error of .043, compared to .052 for Model B), and the "coefficient of determination" jumps dramatically (R^2 of.42, vs. .12). Nevertheless, the more complicated model does not change the fundamental finding here, which is that Kentucky voters did not follow a white backlash pattern, and apparently behaved in just the opposite manner.

Conclusion

Kentucky's 1996 desegregation amendment attracted a surprising amount of opposition. This discouraging response among voters appeared to provide a rare opportunity for studying geographical variation in "old-fashioned racism." Although I knew some white voters opposed the amendment by accident, the black vote for segregation seemed a decent proxy for that error rate, since African Americans had no incentive to embrace Jim Crow constitutional provisions. The black

[15] I repeated Model E, using the county's share of the state white voting population as analytic weights, but this procedure did not appreciably alter the findings.

error rate was so high, however, that African Americans voted for segregation at rates comparable to whites–suggesting mistakes so widespread that county error rates probably had a greater influence on variation in the vote than did racial conservatism.

This chapter presented my best attempt to parse out the intentional opposition to desegregation, and then showed that the geographical pattern of those estimates strongly contradicts the traditional white-backlash hypothesis, especially in urban counties. The results also provided direct, if mild, support for the Cultural Backlash alternative–which anticipates racial conservatism in predominantly white urbanized communities. These findings are useful, because they address a possible flaw in the last two chapters, which is the influence of partisanship on people's candidate choices. Kentucky's 1996 desegregation amendment did not involve candidates or parties. Nevertheless, given the dicey nature of the effort, the prime lesson to draw from this analysis is that direct legislation can be an extremely impure expression of voter preferences.

Appendix 10A: A Pessimistic Approach to Estimating Underlying White Intent

Using King's ecological inference method, allowing the black vote for segregation to vary with racial density (1997, 174-79), I estimated that 33% of Kentucky's white voters endorsed segregation. That figure includes two sets of people: those who support the symbolism of segregation, and those who made an honest mistake in the voting booth. We can portray the segregation vote as a weighted sum of those two components:

$$\beta_w = \gamma_{tw}\beta_e + \gamma_{rw}(1-\beta_e)$$

where β_w represents the observed white vote proportion for segregation, γ_{rw} is the proportion of whites who intended to support Jim Crow symbolism (i.e., racist whites), $\gamma_{tw} = 1-\gamma_{rw}$ is the proportion of whites who intended to *oppose* segregation (i.e., tolerant whites), and β_e represents the proportion of whites who voted the wrong way from what they intended. Note that this formula relies on the assumption that both groups err at the same rate, despite my suspicion that confused voters are far more likely to reject a referendum (one can adjust this basic equation to reflect any plausible assumption about how error rates compare across the two categories).

Because the proportion of tolerant whites is the complement of the proportion of racist whites, I can substitute for γ_{tw} and solve the equation for γ_{rw}, the rate at which voters intended to promote segregation:

$$\beta_w = (1-\gamma_{rw})\beta_e + \gamma_{rw}(1-\beta_e)$$
$$\beta_w = \beta_e - \gamma_{rw}\beta_e + \gamma_{rw} - \gamma_{rw}\beta_e$$
$$\beta_w - \beta_e = \gamma_{rw} - 2\gamma_{rw}\beta_e$$
$$\beta_w - \beta_e = \gamma_{rw}(1-2\beta_e)$$
$$\gamma_{rw} = \frac{\beta_w - \beta_e}{1-2\beta_e}$$

PART III

Why Not Just Ask?