The Effect of Military Campaigns on Political Identity: Evidence from Sherman's March

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Abstract

I use the military march of Union general William Sherman during the American Civil War to estimate the effects of wartime violence and destruction on post-war voting and political outcomes. The results show small and insignificant effects of the march on Confederate monuments construction and lynchings. Only for voting outcomes I find borderline significant effects for some specifications. Specifically, the instrumental variable estimates imply that the march increased the Democratic party vote share by around 10 percentage point, however the estimated coefficients diminish over time. Overall, the results that Sherman's march suggest did not have a transformative impact on the politics in the South.

1 Introduction

Causes and consequences of civil wars have received increased attention within economics in the past decade (Blattman and Miguel, 2010). Study of the political and social effects of wartime violence is important for understanding why some societies spiral back into violence whereas others experience rapid recovery and sustained peace. The existing literature have mostly studied how exposure to violence in war influences cooperation and pro-social behavior (Bauer et al., 2016). However, the evidence on the effect on political identity and behavior is much more limited and ambiguous.

Another important questions that has received less attention is the degree of persistence of the potential effects of war. The existing literature suggests that the destruction in war does not generate persistent local poverty traps and the economy is able recover from these shocks relatively fast.[1] However, the effects

[1]See Miguel and Roland (2011) for the long-run economic effects of bombing Vietnam,

on political behaviouŕ and identity could potentially persist across generations, which could explain the correlations of historical conflict with various aspects of institutions and identity (Besley and Reynal-Querol, 2014; Ray and Esteban, 2017).

I will estimate the long-run effects of notoriously destructive military march of Union General William Sherman during the American Civil War on political outcomes. Specifically, I will examine if the march influenced the vote share of the Democratic party (which prior to 1960s was in the South associated with support for segregation and opposition to attempts to enforce civil rights by the federal government), the construction of Confederate monuments and lynchings. Unlike most previous work which studies recent conflicts I can measure how persistent the potential effects are.

This paper relates to two strands of literature. First are the studies of the effects of wars on social and political preferences and identity. Blattman (2009) and Bellows and Miguel (2009) report higher community participation and political engagement among individuals directly exposed to war violence in northern Uganda and Sierra Leone, respectively. On the other hand, Adhvaryu and Fenske (2014) fail to find any significant effect of exposure to violent conflict in childhood on political beliefs or engagement using surveys of 17 countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Tangent literature within political science studies the long-term effects of repression instead of civil wars but the evidence is not clear here either. Lupu and Peisakhin (2017) show that repression increase political engagement, while Zhukov and Talibova (2018) find the opposite.

Second, this paper also contributes to the literature on the origins and evolution of identity and politics in the US South. Significant part of the literature have emphasized the culture of the British immigrants that first settled the South (Fischer, 1989; Woodard, 2012). This work (together with e.g., Cobb, 2007 and Cooper and Knotts, 2017) is more qualitative in nature. Acharya et al. (2016) examined the legacy of slavery and how it affects wide range of contemporary political attitudes of the white population from partisanship to support for affirmative action. Finally, Feigenbaum et al. (2020) show that the institutions of the South became less coercive in response to a negative eco-

Davis and Weinstein (2002) for the effects of Allied bombing of Japan during World War II, and Brakman et al. (2004) for the impact of destruction of German cities during World War II. All of these studies find no evidence of persistent poverty traps. A small exception is Feigenbaum et al. (2018) who show that the capital destruction caused by Sherman's march in the US South (also subject of this paper) that while the level of economic activity returns to pre-war level 20 years after the war, the differences in allocations of resources in agriculture persist to some degree even after six decades. They explain it by financial frictions.

nomic shock in the form of boll weevil infestation with fewer lynchings and less construction of Confederate monument. The impact of violence and destruction caused by the Civil War on the political outcomes in the US South has not been yet studied quantitatively.

2 Historical background

While the military situation in the Eastern theater of the American Civil War had mostly remained in stalemate during the fall of 1864, Union General William Sherman had successfully concluded his Atlanta campaign in September 1864 by capturing Georgia's capital, Atlanta. The campaign featured, for the most part, conventional warfare of a series of small and large clashes of the Union and Confederate armies. Sherman hoped that he could put pressure on the Confederate army fighting in Virginia by damaging the Southern economy and its warfare capacity (Trudeau, 2009). Thus in the his next campaign, first to Savannah, Georgia and then to Columbia, North Carolina, Sherman ordered the Union army to destroy critical infrastructure including railroads and telegraph lines but also mills and cotton gins. Moreover, as the Union army was deep in the Confederate territory without supply lines, the soldiers had to confiscate the food from the local population, which made Sherman and his army especially unpopular among the Southern whites (Campbell, 2005).

Feigenbaum et al. (2018) show that the capital destruction caused by Sherman's march had negative effect on both agricultural and manufacturing outputs. Although manufacturing recovered faster, the lower investment in agriculture in march-affected counties persisted through 1920.

3 Data

The data come from several different sources. First, I georeferenced the digitized 1865 US War Department map of Sherman's march[2] and combined it with the historical boundaries of the US counties in the states of Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina by Mullen and Bratt (2018). The resulting map of counties with the lines indicating the movements of 15th and 20th armies[3] is shown in

[2]The scanned image of the map can be downloaded from `https://www.loc.gov/item/99447077/`

[3]The paths of the 14th and 17th armies have not yet been georeferenced due to time constraints, nevertheless they followed very similar trajectories.

figure 1. I follow Feigenbaum et al. (2018) and define the "Sherman" counties (i.e., those that were on the march's path) as all counties that intersect with 5 miles band around any of the army movement lines. Feigenbaum et al. (2018) justify it by historical accounts according to which the soldiers did not deviate far from the path of their armies.

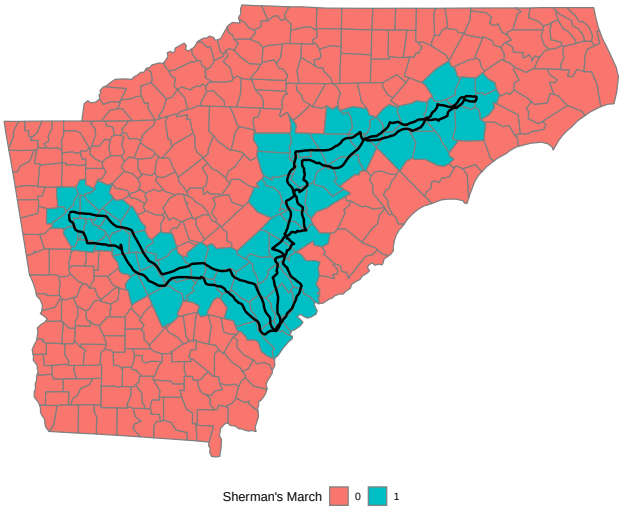

Figure 1: Map of Sherman March

The most historical data on the county level were obtained from the replication files of Acharya et al. (2016) who assembled wide range of variable including the share of slave population in 1860, democratic vote share throughout the years or land inequality in 1860. Alas, some of the observations are missing. Finally, I complemented these data with the database of Confederate monuments created by Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC, 2019), which includes their year of construction, longitude, and latitude.

The descriptive statistics for several variables are provided in table A1 in the appendix. The march and non-march counties do not appear to systematically differ in their vote share for the Democratic party prior to the Civil War. However, the counties on the march's path do have significantly higher proportion of the population that were slaves in 1860. This is consistent with the historical sources that emphasize that Sherman targeted areas with large plantations to undermine the Confederate economy (Trudeau, 2009). Since the legacy of slavery at the local level has been shown to have persistent impact on various political outcomes and behaviours, it will be necessary to control for it

in the empirical analysis.

Another issue that table A1 reveals is the large fraction of missing data for the Democratic vote share in 1860 and before. I discuss this issue further in the following section.

4 Empirical strategy

Below I propose several different methods to identify the effect of Sherman's march. Each one relies on somewhat different set of assumptions and has its own potential drawbacks. Therefore the range of the estimates across specifications might indicate how sensitive are our conclusions to different assumptions.

I will consider three outcomes. First is the vote share of the Democratic party candidates in presidential elections from 1872 to 1964. The Democratic party in the South very strongly opposed abolition of slavery prior to the Civil war. After the Civil war, the Southern Democrats passed various "Jim Crow" laws in the state legislatures that in effect disenfranchised African Americans and mandated racial segregation at public places. Furthermore, the Southern Democrats blocked any efforts of the federal government to enforce civil and voting rights in the South until 1960s. Therefore we can use support for the Democrats as measure of Southern resentment towards the federal government. The second outcome is a dummy variable for a presence of a Confederate monument. The third outcome is the the lynch rate, that is the number of lynches from 1882 to 1930 per 10,000,000 residents (with the number of residents being measured by the 1920 census). The lynching become more common in the South after the Civil war as a mean by which the Southern whites could maintain their social dominance.

4.1 Selection on observables with OLS

The simplest identifying strategy it to assume that conditional on a set of control variables, the Sherman's march was as-if randomly assigned. If we further assume the linear form for the control variables, we can write our specification as

$$y_i = \alpha + \beta \text{march}_i + x_i'\gamma + \epsilon_i \tag{1}$$

where y_i is an outcome for county i, march_i is a dummy variable that equals one if the county i was on the path of Sherman's march and zero otherwise, and

x_i is a vector of control variables. As discussed in section 2, Sherman tended to target counties with large slave plantations according to the historical sources. I will therefore include several variables from the 1860 census as controls to capture this. First is the proportion of slaves on the total population in 1860. Second set of variables relates to local agriculture. These are: (i) the logarithm of total value of the farm per improved acre of farmland in the county, (ii) the logarithm of the acres of improved farmland, and (iii) Gini coefficient of the farmland ownership to measure inequality in the distribution of land (all from the 1860 census). To control for possible targeting of transport infrastructure, I add a dummy variable for access to railways in 1860. Finally, I also include the logarithm of the total population in 1860.

Clearly, the main concern is that there are some unobserved variables that influenced both the probability of being the march's path and out outcome of interest.

4.2 Instrumental variable

If we suspect that variables march_i is endogenous, then OLS is inconsistent. Luckily, we can still identify the effect of the march if a valid and relevant instrumental variable is available. I follow Feigenbaum et al. (2018) who proposes to use a straight line between the three main cities on the march's path (Atlanta - the starting point of the march, Savannah, and Columbia - the end point) as an instrument. The idea behind it is the following: Sherman wanted to march through Atlanta, Savannah, and, Columbia, however, the counties between these cities were to some extent visited only because they happened to be on the way.

This leads to the following two-equation model

$$y_i = \alpha_1 + \beta \text{march}_i + x_i'\gamma + \nu_i \tag{2}$$

$$\text{march}_i = \alpha_2 + \phi \text{line}_i + x_i'\psi + \eta_i \tag{3}$$

where line_i is equal one if the county i intersects with a 20-km wide buffer around the straight line that connects Atlanta to Savannah and Savannah to Columbia and zero otherwise. Other variables are defined the same as in the specification 1. I will estimate the parameters using two stage least squares (2SLS).

Potential problem with this strategy would be if being placed on the line between major cities would have direct effect on the outcomes of interest.

4.3 Difference-in-differences

The panel nature of the data on voting outcomes should in principle enable us to apply difference-in-differences type design. However, there are several practical challenges. The most important is the missing data problem. For 1860 presidential election (the last one before the Civil war), the elections results are missing for 93 counties from 305 in the three states of interest, which is partly caused by the fact that South Carolina did not have popular vote until 1872 (the electors of the state were free to vote for whichever candidate they wanted). For elections prior to 1860, the rate of missingness is even higher. Keeping these problems in mind, I will estimate the following specification using only the data from Georgia and North Carolina

$$v_{i1872} - v_{i1860} = \alpha_0 + \beta \text{march}_i + x_i'\gamma + \epsilon_i \tag{4}$$

where v_{it} is the vote share of the Democratic party in county i in year t, and other variables are defined same as above.

The identifying assumption assumption is that in the absence of the Sherman's march the Democratic vote shares in 1860 and 1872 would have evolved in parallel. Besides the potential violations of parallel threats, the issue of missing data will reduce the statistical power (in the best case), or and can even cause bias and inconsistency of correlated with the error term so the results should be taken with a grain of salt.

5 Results

5.1 Selection on observables with OLS

First, let us consider the effect on the voting outcomes. I ran the the specification 1 for every presidential election from 1872 to 1964 with the vote share of the Democratic party candidate as the dependent variable.[4] The resulting coefficients are plotted in figure 2. We see that until 1948, the coefficients are small (usually below 5%) and positive, however almost all are insignificant at the 5% confidence level. Starting from 1948, the effect becomes negative which could be potentially explained by the realignment of the national Democratic party leaders towards increased acceptance of civil rights. Nevertheless, the 95%

[4] For 1868 elections the data for almost all counties are missing.

confidence intervals on those coefficients are also fairly large and always include zero so any strong conclusions based on them do not seem appropriate.

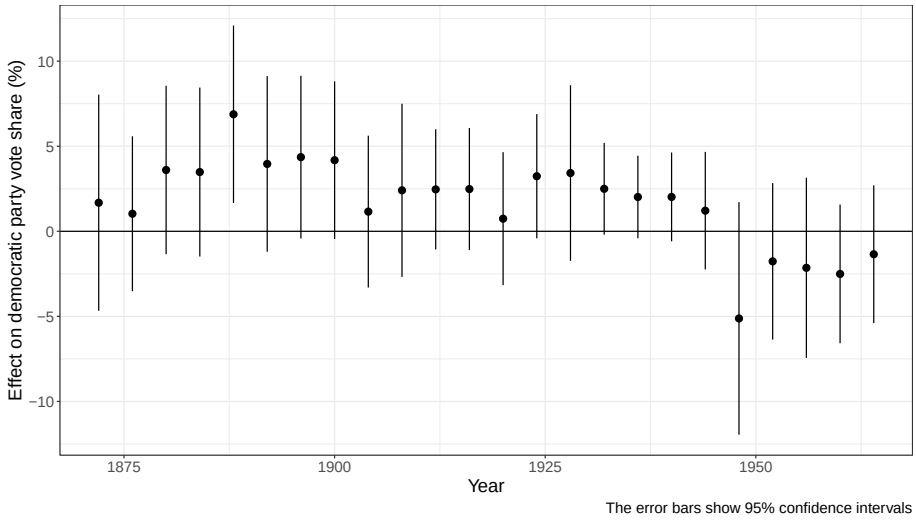

Figure 2: Democrats vote share - OLS - full controls

Next, I move on to other outcomes while using the same specification. Specifically, table A2 shows the results for Confederate monuments dummy and the rate of lynching. We see that the coefficients on Sherman march are small and are not significant for either of the models. For the monuments, none of the variables except the log of total population in 1860 are significant, which might reflect that deeper historical factors included in this regression are not important predictors for decisions to build Confederate monument and contemporaneous events were perhaps more relevant (i.e. people were building the monuments in reactions to the events at the time). As for the rate of lynching, the slave share in 1860 has strong and positive effect and appears to be the most important predictor, which is consistent with the results of Acharya et al. (2016).

5.2 Instrumental variable

Figure 3 plots the coefficients on the march dummy from the instrumental variable specification with the vote share of the Democrats in the respective election year as the dependent variable. All the control variables are assumed to be exogenous. We see that the Sherman-march-exposed counties do appear to vote more for the Democratic presidential candidates in the first 20 years after the

war, nevertheless this effect seems to diminish overtime. Specifically, the results imply that in the elections of 1872 and 1876, the march increased the Democrat's vote share by around 10 percentage point, whereas in the subsequent years this effect tends to be below 6 percentage points. Otherwise, the overall pattern is quite similar to the OLS case.

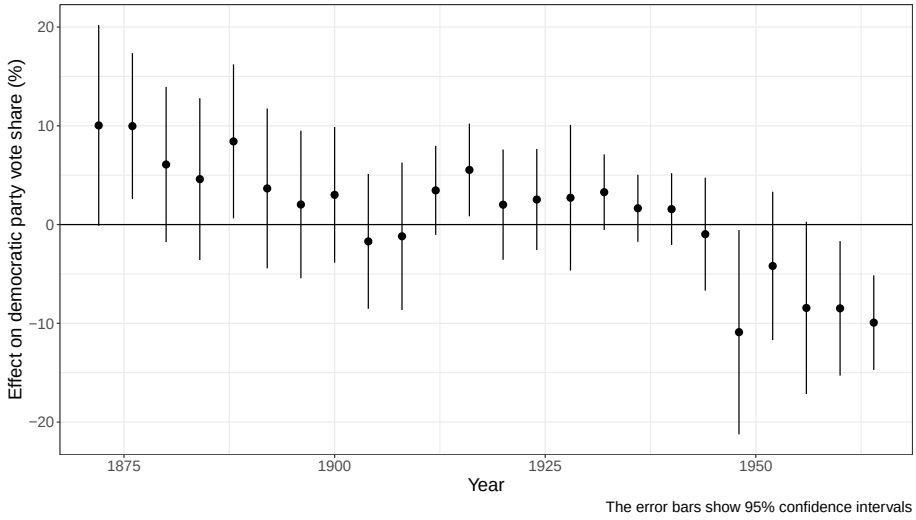

Figure 3: Democrats vote share - IV results

The coefficients for the effects on the Confederate monuments and the lynch rate using 2SLS are presented in table A3. We see that the results are fairly similar to the OLS estimates: again the coefficient on the Sherman's march is not significant in either of the models. Finally the fist stage F-statistic for both of the models is 239.01 and hence our instrument does not appear to be irrelevant or weak.

5.3 Difference-in-differences

The results of the specification 4 are provided in table A4. When no controls are included, the effect of the Sherman's march on the change in the Democratic vote share between 1860 and 1872 is practically zero. However, when our standard set of controls is included, the estimated effect increases to around 7 percentage points and becomes statistically significant at 10% level.

Thus these results are very sensitive to the inclusion of controls, which should probably make us doubt about the validity of the difference-in-differences design

in this application.

6 Conclusion

I estimated the long-term effects of a destructive military campaign, Sherman's march through Georgia, South and North Carolina, on subsequent political outcomes and political identity. Overall the results do not seem to support a view that Sherman's march had a transformative effect or even that it significantly boosted the Southern resentment as some of the historical literature would argue (e.g., Campbell, 2005). At most, the instrumental variable estimates suggest around 10 percentage points increase in the vote share for the Democrats due to the march in the first 15 years of the post-war period, although these effects tend to diminish over time.

Nevertheless, there are several important caveats. First, I test only three different outcomes. The future work could consider broader range of dependent variables. Second, the dataset used was rather small (only 305 counties for the three states) and in some cases the data were missing, which leads to lower statistical power. One potential solution could be to work with data on a smaller spatial scale instead of counties (e.g., for Confederate monuments since there the exact coordinates are available). However, then it might be difficult to control for the covariates where only county-level data is available.

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Appendix

The code necessary for replicating the results of this paper is available at https://github.com/martin-kosiik/sherman-march.

Table A1: Summary statistics

	Off march' path(N=239)	On march's path(N=66)	Overall(N=305)
Democrats voteshare in 1848			
Mean (SD)	44.3 (18.7)	47.3 (17.3)	45.0 (18.4)
Median [Min, Max]	44.1 [1.90, 90.3]	47.5 [4.20, 89.8]	45.7 [1.90, 90.3]
Missing	113 (47.3%)	29 (43.9%)	142 (46.6%)
Democrats voteshare in 1860			
Mean (SD)	6.28 (11.0)	9.83 (10.3)	6.95 (10.9)
Median [Min, Max]	2.60 [0, 70.2]	5.90 [0, 43.1]	2.80 [0, 70.2]
Missing	67 (28.0%)	26 (39.4%)	93 (30.5%)
Democrats voteshare in 1872			
Mean (SD)	52.4 (19.8)	48.1 (24.5)	51.4 (21.0)
Median [Min, Max]	50.5 [8.30, 100]	43.0 [6.10, 100]	49.5 [6.10, 100]
Missing	39 (16.3%)	9 (13.6%)	48 (15.7%)
Lynch rate (1882 to 1930)			
Mean (SD)	0.0121 (0.0177)	0.0119 (0.0146)	0.0120 (0.0170)
Median [Min, Max]	0.00555 [0, 0.101]	0.00698 [0, 0.0650]	0.00626 [0, 0.101]
Missing	6 (2.5%)	0 (0%)	6 (2.0%)
Conf. monuments (dummy)			
Mean (SD)	0.636 (0.482)	0.788 (0.412)	0.669 (0.471)
Median [Min, Max]	1.00 [0, 1.00]	1.00 [0, 1.00]	1.00 [0, 1.00]
Share of slaves in 1860			
Mean (SD)	0.355 (0.202)	0.504 (0.157)	0.388 (0.202)
Median [Min, Max]	0.335 [0.0210, 0.850]	0.497 [0.197, 0.812]	0.394 [0.0210, 0.850]
Land inequality in 1860			
Mean (SD)	0.483 (0.0582)	0.459 (0.0549)	0.478 (0.0583)
Median [Min, Max]	0.485 [0.297, 0.642]	0.458 [0.314, 0.620]	0.478 [0.297, 0.642]
Acres of improv. land in 1860			
Mean (SD)	56200 (45100)	85300 (45000)	62500 (46600)
Median [Min, Max]	46700 [3110, 300000]	86800 [17300, 220000]	52800 [3110, 300000]
Farm value per acre in 1860			
Mean (SD)	23.6 (9.04)	24.4 (13.1)	23.8 (10.0)
Median [Min, Max]	21.8 [6.40, 97.2]	23.9 [6.25, 104]	22.2 [6.25, 104]
Railway access in 1860			
Mean (SD)	0.322 (0.468)	0.591 (0.495)	0.380 (0.486)
Median [Min, Max]	0 [0, 1.00]	1.00 [0, 1.00]	0 [0, 1.00]
Total population in 1860			
Mean (SD)	8400 (5960)	11100 (5620)	8990 (5990)
Median [Min, Max]	7080 [698, 40100]	10200 [2920, 31000]	7820 [698, 40100]

Table A2: Other outcomes - OLS

	Monuments	Lynch rate
(Intercept)	-1.517**	0.080***
	(0.603)	(0.027)
Sherman's march	0.046	-0.003
	(0.061)	(0.002)
Slave share	-0.061	0.029***
	(0.174)	(0.006)
Land inequality	-0.119	-0.039*
	(0.565)	(0.022)
Log of acres of improved land	0.113	0.003
	(0.097)	(0.004)
Log of farm value per acre	0.082	0.001
	(0.100)	(0.004)
Railway access	0.004	0.001
	(0.059)	(0.002)
Log of total population	0.090	-0.011**
	(0.104)	(0.005)
R2	0.139	0.196
R2 Adj.	0.119	0.177
N	305	299
SE type	HC2	HC2

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

All the control variables show their value as of 1860 (i.e. slave share in 1860 etc.). The standard errors are in the parentheses.

Table A3: Other outcomes - IV

	Monuments	Lynch rate
(Intercept)	-1.521**	0.081***
	(0.600)	(0.027)
Sherman's march	0.039	-0.001
	(0.094)	(0.004)
Slave share	-0.059	0.029***
	(0.176)	(0.006)
Land inequality	-0.120	-0.039*
	(0.565)	(0.022)
Log of acres of improved land	0.114	0.003
	(0.096)	(0.004)
Log of farm value per acre	0.082	0.001
	(0.100)	(0.004)
Railway access	0.005	0.001
	(0.060)	(0.002)
Log of total population	0.089	-0.011**
	(0.104)	(0.005)
R2	0.139	0.194
R2 Adj.	0.119	0.175
N	305	299
SE type	HC2	HC2

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

All the exogenous variables show their value as of 1860 (i.e. slave share in 1860 etc.). The standard errors are in the parentheses.

Table A4: Democratic vote share difference (between 1860 and 1872)

	(1)	(2)
(Intercept)	47.662***	134.438***
	(1.492)	(35.296)
Sherman's march	0.508	6.949*
	(3.642)	(3.609)
Slave share		-34.901***
		(7.672)
Land inequality		-30.254
		(25.081)
Log of acres of improved land		9.678*
		(5.042)
Log of farm value per acre		6.661
		(4.705)
Railway access		-2.899
		(2.645)
Lof of total population		-20.734***
		(5.336)
R2	0.000	0.280
R2 Adj.	-0.005	0.255
N	210	210
SE type	HC2	HC2

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$
All the control variables show their value as of 1860 (i.e. slave share in 1860 etc.). The standard errors are in the parentheses. South Carolina counties were excluded due to absence of popular vote in 1860