

The Vietnam War and Racial Integration*

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Abstract

The Vietnam draft conscripted hundreds of thousands of young Americans into an integrated military. I combine near-random draft lottery variation with administrative voter data to study the long-run racial integration effects of coerced national service. Black and Native American veterans became more likely to marry white spouses, identify as Republicans, and live in more-integrated neighborhoods. Improved economic standing may partly mediate these effects. Effects are larger for Southerners and are precisely null for white veterans. Coerced military service generates substantial but asymmetric cross-racial political convergence and racial integration: Vietnam-era service caused about 20 percent of affected cohorts' interracial marriages.

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I'm convinced part of Martin Luther King's dream came true in Vietnam. In his famous 1963 speech at the Lincoln Memorial he said he had a dream that one day the sons of former slaves and sons of slave owners would sit at the same table. That dream came true in only one place, the front lines of Vietnam. I'm not talking about Larry Bird and Dennis Johnson playing on the Celtics together. I'm talking about thousands of Americans who found their common humanity on the front, where they shared the last drop of water, where they gave their lives for each other. Certainly putting on a uniform doesn't wipe away racism, but despite what I've described, the Armed Forces during the war and even today is the most successfully integrated institution in our society—except perhaps the National Basketball Association and some of our prisons.

~Wallace Terry, author of Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War¹

1 Introduction

Many nations face persistently high levels of economic, political, residential, and interpersonal segregation by race. Political interest in facilitating racial integration has motivated a substantial social-scientific literature on whether and when interracial contact between children and young adults affects youths' subsequent racial attitudes and behaviors (Williams, 1948; Allport, 1954). Governments maintain three primary sets of institutions in which policy changes could foster youths' interracial contact: public education, public housing, and national service. This study provides quasi-experimental evidence on the long-run racial integration and political identity effects of integrated national service in the United States.

I study the Vietnam War draft, which conscripted over 200,000 teenagers into two-year stints in an integrated military (Angrist, 1990). The draft was conducted via an imperfectly-randomized lottery over birth dates, with almost one-third of men in the 1950–1952 birth cohorts called up (which I term 'VDL' status, for the Vietnam Draft Lottery). I employ month-year and day-month fixed effects to isolate quasi-random variation in VDL status. I then estimate the local average treatment effect of military conscription on minority (Black or Native American) and white youths' long-run racial integration and political identity by using VDL status as an instrument. The resulting Wald estimators account for imperfect compliance in conscription resulting from VDL-status men's draft deferments and non-VDL men's voluntary enlistment.

I measure racial integration and political identity using a comprehensive 51-state 2022 voter registration database constructed by the firm L2. The data contain the name, birth date (which

¹From an interview published by Wilhelm (1987).

determines VDL status), home address, gender, political party membership, and imputed race and economic standing of about 3.6 million American men (about 81 percent) in the 1950–1952 birth cohorts.² I compare the race of men’s spouses, the racial composition of their neighborhoods, and their political affiliations between minority and white men with and without VDL status. I also compare men’s economic standing by VDL status, which could play a role in explaining observed differences.

I find that military conscription in the Vietnam War meaningfully reshaped the social lives of minority (Black and Native American) veterans. Their likelihood of marrying a white spouse rose by over 40 percent ($p = 0.03$), and the share of their neighbors who were themselves minorities (relative to the rest of their county) likely declined by about 2 percentage points ($p = 0.09$). These estimates are confirmed by a 100-year time series analysis of interracial marriage patterns that reveal elevated intermarriage rates of Black veterans in all years following the military’s early 1950s integration. Point estimates among minority veterans from the Jim Crow South – where race relations were more discordant – are larger than in the rest of the country, though I cannot distinguish between greater compliance in conscription and larger conscription treatment effects. The estimated magnitudes imply that at least 20 percent of all Black-white intermarriages in the early 1950s cohorts – and a higher share in earlier years, when more men were veterans – were caused by service in the integrated military.

Vietnam War conscription also reshaped the political affiliation of minority veterans. Only 7 percent of minority men from the early 1950’s cohorts are Republicans, reflecting the strong mid-century shift of minority voters toward the Democratic Party as that party became more associated with minority rights (Kuziemko and Washington, 2018). Conscription causes minority veterans’ political identities to converge toward those of their white peers, with their likelihood of being a Republican in 2022 rising by 40 percent ($p < 0.01$).

While the interracial contact and cohesion facilitated by Vietnam War conscription could explain these observed effects on minority veterans, other channels may also contribute. Using imputed income and wealth measures provided by L2 (derived in part from home valuation and ownership records), I find that VDL status appears to have raised the long-run economic stand-

²Race and economic standing (and sometimes political party) are imputed by L2. I discuss the imputation below and in Appendix A.

ing of conscripted minority veterans, with imputed income gains in their early 70s of as much as 9 percent ($p < 0.01$) that reflect measurable increases in home value and square footage.³ It is difficult to quantify the magnitude of a potential economic channel in explaining the observed effects absent causal estimates of the relationship between economic standing and racial integration. Given economic standing's weak correlation with both interracial marriage and Republican party membership among minority voters, however, only a small share of the effect of VDL status on those outcomes can likely be explained by that channel.

Vietnam War conscription had very different effects on the white youths who made up the large majority of the war's veterans. Along each measured dimension of racial integration and political identity, point estimates are at least an order of magnitude smaller than those estimated for minority veterans and are statistically indistinguishable from 0. Estimates on the economic standing of white conscripts are non-zero but small. Integrated national service in Vietnam appears to have led minority veterans toward lives that were more interconnected with and similar to those of white Americans – interpersonally, residentially, politically, and economically – without any symmetric long-run changes along those same dimensions by white veterans. While these asymmetric effects could plausibly stem from minority veterans' relatively greater exposure to other-race soldiers, a back-of-the-envelope comparison suggests that the observed asymmetry is even greater than could be explained by the relative difference in interracial contact.

The presented findings are robust to several potential threats to identification. One possible threat in this setting would be differential selection into the voter registration file by VDL status, either because of differential mortality or because VDL status or conscription affects men's likelihood of voter registration. I find precise null relationships between VDL status and the number of male registered voters by birth date, the share of voters who are female, or the share of male voters who are minority, and find that voter density is continuous near the VDL-status cutoff. A second potential threat is that statistical error in the imputation of voters' race may bias estimates for minority and white veterans toward each other, likely resulting in downward bias for minority veterans and upward bias for white veterans. I replicate the presented analysis among voters from the six Southern states where race is directly elicited during voter registration; estimates on

³Prior studies have found positive but statistically-noisy labor market effects of Vietnam War conscription for non-white veterans (Angrist, 1990; Angrist and Chen, 2011), though their inclusion of Hispanic and Asian Americans (many of whom had not been naturalized in time to be eligible for the Vietnam draft) likely attenuates their estimates.

interracial marriage are qualitatively and statistically similar, while the estimates on residential integration and political identity are similar-magnitude but statistically noisier. Finally, I conduct a series of placebo exercises examining men born on the same VDL-status dates in 1953–1955 (among whom there was no conscription) and women born on the VDL-status dates (who were not conscripted), generally finding precise null relationships with long-run racial integration, political identity, and economic outcomes. This provides additional evidence that the Vietnam draft, not some other feature of VDL-status dates, explains the observed results.

This study primarily contributes to the broad literature on intergroup contact (Williams, 1948). Transitory intergroup contact causes short-run prejudice reduction among majority-group youths (Paluck et al., 2019), but less is known about the relationship between interracial contact and actual later-life racial integration. Policies that target children tend to have the largest effects; for example, Bazzi et al. (2019) and Chyn et al. (2023) show that government resettlement programs increased minority children’s later-life residential integration and intermarriage in Indonesia and the Chicago suburbs, with the latter partly mediated by residential resettlement’s large effects on education and economic standing.⁴ Southern white (Black) children who attend more racially diverse high schools are more likely to be registered Democrats (independents) in 2020s adulthood (Billings et al., 2021; Kaplan et al., 2023).⁵ Studies of late teenagers – e.g. studies of interracial college roommates (Marmaros and Sacerdote, 2006; Boisjoly et al., 2006; Camargo et al., 2010; Corno et al., 2022) and class peers (Carrell et al., 2019) – have documented small increases in white students’ short-run interracial friendships, but longer-run integration outcomes have not been investigated. I document the long-run integration and political effects of both minority and majority teenagers’ two-year integrated national service – a policy-relevant setting that combines extended interracial contact with foreign deployment and military activities (MacGregor, 1985) – finding similar effects on Black veterans from around the country to Chicago’s Gautreaux Assisted Housing Program (Chyn et al., 2023) despite the later age at which veterans were treated.

Several prior studies have investigated the effects of military service on racial attitudes and behaviors. Most similarly to the present study, Green and Hyman-Metzger (2024) detect positive

⁴Evidence of a positive within-school relationship between high school cohort diversity and white students’ later-life racial integration (Merlino et al., 2019, 2022) has not been validated by quasi-experimental shocks to white students’ neighborhoods or school composition (Gordon and Reber, 2018; Goldman et al., 2024), though Shen (2018) finds evidence of increased cross-race partnership among Black women following school desegregation.

⁵Fouka (2020) shows that within-school assimilation can reduce minority students’ long-run ethnic integration.

but statistically noisy effects of VDL status on white Vietnam veterans’ racial attitudes among about 500 respondents to the General Social Survey (GSS), but do not investigate outcomes for non-white conscripts.⁶ I investigate majority and minority veterans’ behaviors corresponding to these reported attitudes with substantially greater statistical power (higher N by four orders of magnitude) and reject meaningful effects for majority veterans. Ang and Chinoy (2023, 2025) document that conscription into the *segregated* US military of the first World War caused political attitudes to polarize by race without affecting economic outcomes, the opposite effect that I observe for minority veterans of an integrated military.⁷ Fryer (2007) documents a correlation between interracial marriage and veteran status since the 1970’s, particularly for Black veterans; I show that this relationship began for Black veterans only after the military integrated, that it did not begin for white veterans until the military transitioned to being all-volunteer, and that only the relationship for Black veterans is causal (and is fully explained by the causal effect).

2 Background

The Vietnam Draft Lottery comprised three birth-date lotteries held in 1969, 1970, and 1971. The first lottery covered the 1944–1950 birth cohorts, and the subsequent lotteries covered the 1951 and 1952 cohorts. Each lottery purportedly-randomly ordered each birth date from 1 to 365/366, and the military satisfied its labor demand by sequentially drafting men in this order over the subsequent year. As a result, the number of birth dates that were drafted in each year was determined by contemporaneous military demand, and undrafted men did not know whether the military’s demand would be sufficiently high to result in their being drafted until the end of the draft year.

Each year thus had an ‘Administrative Processing Number’ (APN) between 1 and 366: men

⁶Specifically, Green and Hyman-Metzger (2024) show some evidence that white Vietnam veterans have more positive attitudes toward Black ambition and other peoples’ cross-race friendships. Green et al. (2019) estimate approximately null effects of VDL status on white veterans’ 2014 party membership. Lawrence and Kane (1995) show a negative observational relationship between veteran status and racial attitudes among white GSS respondents.

⁷Studies of conscription in Spain (Bagues and Roth, 2023; Cáceres-Delpiano et al., 2021) and Argentina (Navajas et al., 2022; Ronconi and Ramos-Toro, 2025) have shown that veterans who served abroad build contacts and culturally integrate with other regions, gain stronger national identity, and are more conservative, but have not studied heterogeneity between conscripts from minority and majority groups. Dahl et al. (2021) show that gender-integrated military units lead men to have more egalitarian attitudes in the short- but not long-run, but they do not study outcomes for women.

whose ordered birth dates placed them at or below the APN were drafted. I define ‘VDL status’ to indicate all American men in the appropriate cohort with birth dates assigned lottery numbers below the APN: 195 for the 1950 cohort, 125 for the 1951 cohort, and 95 for the 1952 cohort. Men with VDL status were obligated to report to over 4,000 local draft boards. Deferments could be granted to students, fathers, members of certain professions, the physically unfit, and the low-testing, with local draft boards wielding considerable discretion over who was ultimately conscripted.⁸ Draftees typically completed two years of military service before returning to civilian life, and were eligible for subsidized college education from the GI Bill subsequent to their conscription.

Angrist and Chen (2011) show that ‘winning’ the lottery and being assigned Vietnam draft lottery (“VDL”) status increased Census respondents’ likelihood of veteran status by 10–15 percentage points for the 1950–1952 birth cohorts: 20–25 percent of undrafted men in these cohorts nevertheless enlisted, while the remaining VDL-status men received draft deferments or otherwise were never conscripted. They show much smaller effects of VDL status on enlistment in the pre-1950 cohorts, for which reason I exclude those birth cohorts in both the main and placebo analysis. While later lotteries were also held for the 1953–1956 birth cohorts, the military did not draft any members of these cohorts.

Lottery assignment was imperfectly randomized for the 1950 birth cohort, apparently due to insufficient mixing of the November and December dates in the lottery ball hopper; the result was higher VDL risk in later months (Fienberg, 1971).⁹

While about 13 percent of Americans in 1970 were Black or Native American, minority soldiers made up more than 23 percent of combat soldiers and about 2 percent of officers (Goodwin, 2017). The US military integrated its last all-Black units in 1954, and soldiers in Vietnam shared training and deployment units, barracks, meals, and leisure time across racial lines (Terry, 1985). Fiman et al. (1975) report that about 60 percent of Vietnam veterans believed that race relations were better in the military than in the United States, with similar beliefs across veteran race and a

⁸The availability of deferments for university enrollees and fathers also led to small increases in college enrollment (Card and Lemieux, 2001) and young parenthood (Bailey and Chyn, 2020) among VDL-status men, likely among men from higher-income backgrounds in the former case (Bleemer and Quincy, 2024).

⁹Erikson and Stoker (2011) and Berinsky and Chatfield (2015) find some evidence that VDL status from the first draft lottery predicts political attitudes ($p = 0.003$) and party identification ($p = 0.103$), respectively, among birth cohorts whose veteran status was little affected by the draft (Angrist and Chen, 2011).

higher rate among combat veterans.

3 Data

I measure racial integration and political identity using a 2022 national voter registration database provided by the consumer data firm L2 (L2, Inc., 2022). The data contain voters' name, birth date, residential address, and gender. L2 imputes race by past and current first, middle, and last names and Census Block racial composition (for some Black voters) using observed race in the registration data of six Southern states (Rosenman et al., 2023).¹⁰ Vietnam Draft Lottery (VDL) status is determined by birth date.¹¹ I define minority status to include Black and Native American voters but not Hispanic voters, since about 43 percent of 2022 Hispanic US citizens in these cohorts are naturalized and were thus unlikely to be draft-eligible in the 1970s.¹²

The L2 database includes measures of two behavioral outcomes that reflect racial integration. Interracial marriage is measured by matching each voter to their spouse's race, where 'spouse' is defined as an individual's only coresident at the same address (including unit number in multi-unit buildings) within 15 years of their age.¹³ Residential integration is measured by the 2020 minority share of the voter's residential Census Block (US Census Bureau, 2021). I measure political identity by each voters' political party registration. The L2 data also includes several measures of economic success, including a continuous prediction of income and an eight-category prediction of wealth constructed by L2 using individual-level homeownership, home valuation, home and plot square footage, and other characteristics. I also link each voter to the average 2021 household income in their Zip code (Internal Revenue Service, 2024). Appendix A provides further details on variable definitions, coverage, and external validation of the L2 data.

The 3.6 million men born in 1950–1952 comprise 81 percent of the 4.5 million such male

¹⁰See Appendix B for details and validation of L2's racial imputation.

¹¹Six percent of records are excluded because they omit birth date; another 1.6 percent are excluded because their reported January 1 and July 1 birth dates are used as placeholder birth dates in many states.

¹²In contrast, the naturalization rate among Black and Native American US citizens was 8 and 2 percent, respectively; the naturalization rate for white citizens was 4 percent. Statistics from the 2021 American Community Survey (Ruggles et al., 2018).

¹³Figure BB-1 shows that imputed L2 intermarriage rates match imputed and true rates in the 2021 American Community Survey (ACS). I choose 15 because it minimizes the sum of types 1 and 2 error in the ACS for both white and minority respondents; see A (Figure AA-1) and Bleemer et al. (2021, 2017). I discuss robustness to alternative cutoffs below.

citizens implied by the 2022 American Community Survey; the remaining men are not registered to vote (see Table A-1). About 7 (73) percent of those voters are identified as Black or Native American (white), relative to 10 (77) percent in the same-aged male citizen population, and 65 percent have a ‘spouse’.

4 Methodology

Let individual i have the birth date $t = \{m, d, y\}$. I exploit the near-random assignment of VDL status by estimating linear models of the following form by OLS:

$$Y_{it} = \beta VDL_t + \gamma_{my} + \delta_{md} + \epsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

where VDL_t indicates VDL status, γ_{my} and δ_{md} are year-month and month-day fixed effects, and the model is estimated over males from the 1950–1952 birth cohorts. The fixed effects purge bias resulting from possible correlation between Y_{it} and either imperfect cross-month randomization or small sample bias, comparing each voter to others in their same birth month and to voters born on the same date in other years. I interpret the resulting β as the causal effect of VDL status on Y_{it} .

The relationship between VDL status and conscription exhibits strong non-compliance: among non-white individuals, about 70 percent were never-takers (exempted from conscription) and 20 percent were always-takers who would have enlisted even absent VDL status (Angrist and Chen, 2011). I estimate the effect of conscription – under the exclusion restriction that VDL status only affects Y_{it} by leading compliers to conscription – using Wald estimators that employ the estimated change in veteran status resulting from VDL status reported in Angrist and Chen (2011).¹⁴ The resulting Wald estimates would be biased if VDL status also affected long-run outcomes by means other than conscription – e.g. by incentivizing marriage or college enrollment to defer the draft (e.g. Card and Lemieux, 2001) or through the long-run effects of draft-related anxiety (Erikson and Stoker, 2011) – though those studies show that these channels are likely second-order in magnitude.

One potential threat to the identification of β is differential selection into the US voter registra-

¹⁴Angrist and Chen (2011) show that VDL status increases the likelihood of veteran status by 9.0 (s.e. 0.34) and 14.5 (0.13) percentage points in the 2000 US Census for non-white and white youths, respectively. I employ the ‘non-white’ estimate for the minority sample; the resulting first-stage F -statistics are over 500. Estimates from SSA veteran status are slightly higher for white youths (Angrist et al., 2011).

tion file by VDL status: conscription could affect the decision to register through either differential mortality or changed preferences.¹⁵ I test for differential selection into the registration file by estimating versions of Equation 1 at the *date* level – that is, an observation is a date in 1950–1952 – where Y_t represents characteristics of that date: the number or log number of male voters with that birth date, the gender share of voters with that birth date, and the share of male voters with that birth date who are minority. Table 1 shows that there is no measurable relationship between these characteristics and the date’s VDL status by race in either the baseline national voter sample or in the restricted set of six Southern states where race is directly observed in voter registration data (see below).¹⁶ The standard errors reject even small differences; for example, VDL-status birth dates differ from non-VDL-status dates in their number of registered-voter white male births by -0.7 to 0.5 percent (using a 95-percent confidence interval). These estimates provide little reason to expect differential selection by VDL status into 2022 voter registration.

5 Minority Racial Integration

Table 2 presents estimates of Equation 1 for minority voters. It shows that VDL status increased minority voters’ later-life racial integration, with their reduced-form likelihood of having a white spouse rising by 0.34 percentage points ($t = 2.2$)¹⁷ and the minority share of their residential Block falling by 0.19 percentage points ($t = 1.7$).¹⁸ Minority voters’ likelihood of being registered as Republicans rose by 0.27 percentage points ($t = 2.6$), narrowing the minority-white gap in party registration.¹⁹ Given that VDL status only increased minority citizens’ likelihood of having

¹⁵Angrist et al. (2010) and Conley and Heerwig (2012) find no evidence of differential mortality resulting from VDL status in administrative US death records. About 1 percent of Vietnam enlistees and draftees were killed in the war, which would combine with the first stage to generate a sample decline of about 0.1 percentage points.

¹⁶Figure A-1 further shows no measurable change in voter density at lottery numbers near the annual conscription APN.

¹⁷Interracial marriage estimates are conditional on having a spouse. Table A-2 shows that there is no statistical relationship between VDL status and having a spouse, a finding confirmed in the 2000 Census (Angrist and Chen, 2011). Table A-3 shows that β is little-changed using alternative year cutoffs for the spousal definition.

¹⁸Regressions on Census Block composition include (endogenous) county fixed effects to isolate neighborhood choice as distinct from regional residential decisions; estimates are somewhat larger and more rejective of a null hypothesis ($t = 2.1$) when these fixed effects are omitted (Table A-4).

¹⁹Estimates are similar when restricted to states where party registration is directly observed (Table A-4). Table A-5 shows that the estimated effects of VDL status are not concentrated in a single bin of lottery numbers, though bin-specific estimates are too noisily estimated to mirror between-bin variation in the first stage from Angrist and Chen (2011).

served in the military by about 9 percentage points, Panel A shows much larger Wald estimates: conscripted minority veterans’ likelihood of interracial marriage rose 3.6 percentage points (from an 8 percent baseline) and Republican membership rose 2.9 percentage points from a 7 percent baseline. The in-sample standard deviation of residential Block minority share is 32.2, implying that conscripted minority veterans resided in neighborhoods with almost 0.1 standard deviations fewer minority residents.

Panel B of Table 2 presents a placebo exercise in which 1953–1955 voters are assigned placebo VDL status as if they were born exactly three years earlier.²⁰ We do not expect differential outcomes for these groups because none of them were conscripted. Panel B confirms that the VDL-status dates are not meaningfully correlated with later-life residential integration or political identity absent conscription; the coefficients are uniformly small and statistically insignificant.²¹

Narrative accounts of Black Vietnam veterans from the Jim Crow South suggest that minority veterans from those states were particularly impacted by integrated military service, with many encountering Black leaders of mixed groups and other features of racial integration for the first time (e.g. Terry, 1985). While I cannot observe birth state in the voter database, Panel C of Table 2 shows that reduced-form point estimates of the effect of VDL status on racial integration and political convergence are substantially (though not statistically significantly) larger and more statistically differentiable from 0 among residents of the South. However, because prior studies have not reported the relationship between VDL status and veteran status among Southern residents, I cannot distinguish larger treatment effects of conscription from larger first-stage treatment effects on veteran status (which may have led to larger observed changes in Y_{it} in turn).²²

The baseline estimates could be attenuated by imperfect racial measurement, since the minority voter sample is selected using the racial imputation algorithm provided by L2. The resulting bias might be particularly pronounced (and non-classical) when the outcome is minority Block share,

²⁰There were draft lotteries for the 1953–1955 cohorts – with numbers orthogonal to 1950–1952 VDL status – but no lottery numbers were drafted. The 1947–1949 cohorts were technically drafted using the same dates as 1950, though Angrist and Chen (2011) show that the lottery had little effect on their enlistment.

²¹Figure A-2 shows that estimates from an alternative ‘regression discontinuity’ research design focusing on outcome differences at the VDL-status APN cutoff is underpowered to estimate similar treatment effects, though it does uncover some further evidence of a decline in interracial marriage among just-above-cutoff minority voters.

²²Living in the South is an imperfect proxy for conscription in the South and could be endogenous to VDL status, though Table A-2 shows that that VDL status does not meaningfully affect whether minority veterans reside in the South. However, VDL status does increase Southern residency among white veterans; see Green (2024).

since this information is used as part of L2’s race algorithm for some Black voters (though its implementation is orthogonal to voters’ VDL status). I test the empirical relevance of this bias in Panel D of Table 2, which replicates the baseline analyses in the restricted set of six Southern states where race is directly observed in voter registration data.²³ The estimated effects of VDL status on having a white spouse are quantitatively and statistically similar to the full sample, whereas the estimates on residential integration and political identity are similar-magnitude but statistically noisier (and not statistically distinguishable from 0), providing supportive evidence for the baseline findings.²⁴

As an additional placebo check, Appendix C replicates these analyses among *female* voters from the 1950–1952 birth cohorts. While there is no measurable relationship between women’s VDL status and either their later-life racial integration or economic standing – and even small positive racial integration relationships can be precisely rejected – there is surprising evidence that VDL-status women are 0.3 percentage points more likely to be registered Democrats ($t = 3.3$), possibly reflecting sampling error.

The interracial contact and cohesion facilitated by Vietnam War conscription provide one channel that could explain these observed effects, but other channels may have also contributed. Angrist and Chen (2011) provide statistically-noisy ($t = 1.6$) evidence that non-white VDL-status Americans attended about 0.02 more years of college – likely because college-going provided enrollees with a draft deferment (and not due to GI Bill benefits; Card and Lemieux, 2001) – but this effect is very small. Angrist and Chen (2011) also show that conscripted minority veterans were over 10 percentage points more likely to work in the public sector ($t = 3.8$), which may have provided both employment stability and a relatively desegregated workplace. Conscription may have also integrated veterans by uprooting them from their potentially-segregated home communities.

Another potential mechanism that could explain minority veterans’ racial integration and political convergence is that minority veterans may have economically benefited from their military service.²⁵ Table 3 provides evidence that VDL status resulted in economic benefits to minority

²³This no-imputation panel also redefines ‘White Spouse’ to use reported race of the identified spouse and ‘Registered Party’ is restricted to states where political party is reported.

²⁴State-by-state heterogeneity (Figure A-3) suggests that the interracial marriage effect is driven by border states like Missouri, Kentucky, and Virginia, whereas the political ideology effects are strongest in the South and Midwest. Table BB-1 replicates null placebo results in the no-imputation sample.

²⁵Angrist (1990) and Angrist and Chen (2011) present positive but statistically-noisy evidence of VDL status on non-white veterans’ wages. Greenberg et al. (2022) shows that enlistment provided large wage gains and increases in

veterans in their early 70s. VDL status leads minority veterans to higher L2-imputed income by about 9 percent, while estimates on Zipcode-level income and L2-imputed wealth are smaller and statistically indistinguishable from 0. The right half of Table 3 presents estimated effects on some of the observable components that L2 uses to construct its income imputation: conscripted minority veterans own homes with 8 percent higher value and 8 percent more square feet of residential space, while their homeownership rates and lot size appear slightly larger but are statistically indistinguishable from 0. Absent estimates of the local causal relationship between economic standing and the presented measures of racial integration and political identity, however, I cannot quantify the contribution of minority veterans’ improved economic circumstances to their racial integration and political convergence.²⁶

6 White Racial Integration

In order to test for possible asymmetry in the effects of conscription on minority and majority veterans, Table 4 reports the effect of VDL status on racial integration, politics, and economic standing for white voters. Despite considerable statistical power, I find no statistical evidence of any meaningful relationship between conscription and majority veterans’ racial integration or political identity, with most of the Wald estimators one or more orders of magnitude smaller than estimates for minority voters.²⁷ The standard deviation of Block minority shares across the white baseline sample is 12.4 percentage points, implying that the Wald estimator rejects increases of any more than 0.02 standard deviations.²⁸

Panel B of Table 4 shows similarly-precise null relationships between 1953–1955 white voters’ placebo VDL status and later-life integration, political affiliation, and economic standing. Panel C shows comparable null estimates among white voters in the six Southern states where race is directly observed, with one exception: there is evidence that white VDL-status Southerners are

average income of residential Zip code to 1990’s volunteer Black (but not white) veterans at the enlistment test score margin.

²⁶Under the strong assumptions of linear mediation analysis – that each outcome’s cross-sectional relationship with economic standing is causal – economic standing explains only 10–30 percent of the observed effects (Table A-6).

²⁷The point estimates on economic standing suggest very small statistically-precise economic gains for conscripted white men (though they live in lower-income Zip codes); the estimates are within the confidence intervals of Angrist and Chen (2011)’s approximately-null wage effects for white Vietnam veterans in the 2000 Census.

²⁸Table A-7 shows that the presented estimates are little-changed by 2022 county fixed effects or if restricted to states where party registration is observed.

more likely to be registered Republicans ($t = 3.6$), though this may be the result of differential white selection into Southern residency (see Table A-2). As an additional placebo test, Appendix C’s Table CC-3 shows uniformly null relationships between VDL status and outcomes for 1950–1952 white female voters.

While the effects of Vietnam War conscription on white and minority veterans’ later-life racial integration and political identity are asymmetric, this need not imply that the effects of interracial contact are asymmetric. Assume that all observed effects are the result of interracial contact with other soldiers and that a typical soldier interacted with other soldiers who were 77 percent white and 23 percent minority (Goodwin, 2017). Consider a model in which the effect of contact is proportional to the share of experienced soldiers who are other-race (either white or minority). This would imply that the effect of conscription on minority veteran outcomes would be about four times larger than that on white veteran outcomes. I find suggestive evidence of further asymmetry: the interracial marriage ($p = 0.06$) and residential composition ($p = 0.09$) effects of minority veterans’ coerced military service in Vietnam were *more* than four times larger than that on white veterans, though I find no such evidence regarding political identity.

7 Contextualizing Conscription’s Effect on Interracial Marriage

Figure 1 visualizes the overall trend in males’ Black-white interracial marriage by race, veteran status, and birth cohort using data from the US Census and the American Community Survey (Ruggles et al., 2018). The interracial marriage rates of Black veterans and non-veterans diverge in the late 1920’s birth cohorts – the first to serve following the military’s integration in 1950 – but there is no parallel divergence for white veterans, providing further evidence that military integration boosts interracial marriage asymmetrically.²⁹ White veterans’ relative likelihood of interracial marriage jumps upward after the 1953 birth cohort, when the military transitions to being all-volunteer (increasing the potential for differential selection).³⁰ Interracial marriage has

²⁹Fryer (2007) points out that veterans’ overall interracial marriage rate rose in the late 1920’s cohorts but does not differentiate between Black and white veterans; the latter experienced no increase in interracial marriage. He also notes that “With the current data, it is impossible to distinguish between selection ... and treatment”.

³⁰Figure A-4 plots the veteran-nonveteran gaps in percentage points and percent, further emphasizing little relationship between white veteran status and interracial marriage until the all-volunteer era. White women’s likelihood of interracial marriage sharply increases following the Vietnam War (Figure A-5).

been steadily rising and is much higher for Black men (over 10 percent) than for white men (less than 1 percent).

In the early 1950's birth cohorts, married Black veterans were about 2.5 percentage points more likely to have a white spouse than Black non-veterans. Assuming that the treatment effect of conscription on interracial marriage is the same as the average treatment effect of *all* military service, this is well within the confidence interval of the estimated Wald treatment effect reported in Table 2 (3.6 ± 3.3 percentage points), suggesting that the entire observational gap (and maybe more) is causal.

About 30 percent of Black male Americans of the 1950–1952 birth cohorts were veterans. Just under 5 percent of Black Americans from those cohorts married white spouses; three-quarters of those marriages were between a Black man and a white woman. Assuming that the effects of coerced military service are reflective of the average effect of serving in the US military in the early 1970s, these estimates imply that about 20 percent of all Black-white intermarriages in the early 1950's cohorts – and 25 percent of those including Black men – were caused by the combination of military integration and service. These shares were likely even higher for Black men born in the 1930s and 1940s, over 40 percent of whom were veterans (see Figure A-6).

Conclusion

Conscription into integrated military service in Vietnam led minority veterans to converge toward their white compatriots in terms of likelihood of marrying a white spouse and Republican party registration – closing each gap by 4–8 percent – and appears to have led minority veterans to live in substantially more racially-integrated neighborhoods. It had no effect on the racial integration or political identity of white veterans. Real-world high-impact policies that place young adults in relatively racially integrated environments – albeit those where minority youths remain the minority – may have asymmetric effects, meaningfully integrating minority groups with little measurable impact on majority groups' future integration or political identities.

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Table 1: The Vietnam Draft and Selection into the 2021 Voter Sample

	Minority Voters			White Voters			
	# Male Voters	Log Male Voters	% Voters Female	# Male Voters	Log Male Voters	% Voters Female	% Voters Minority
Panel A: Baseline Lottery Sample							
VDL Status	-119 (129)	-0.004 (0.005)	0.05 (0.16)	-202 (790)	-0.001 (0.003)	-0.04 (0.06)	-0.03 (0.04)
$\bar{Y}$ N	24,732 1,090	5.5 1,090	59.2 1,090	242,093 1,090	7.8 1,090	53.1 1,090	7.5 1,090
Panel B: Voters with No Imputed Data							
VDL Status	-29 (71)	-0.004 (0.009)	0.10 (0.28)	282 (216)	0.006 (0.005)	-0.13 (0.13)	-0.14 (0.12)
$\bar{Y}$ N	8,295 1,090	4.4 1,090	59.6 1,090	44,210 1,090	6.1 1,090	53.8 1,090	14.2 1,090
$\gamma_{my} + \delta_{md}$	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Note: OLS regressions over 1950–1952 birth dates of the number of male voters, log number of male voters, share voters female, and share voters who are Black or Native American (minority) with each birth date on whether that birth date was eligible for the Vietnam Draft Lottery (VDL). The first three columns are restricted to minority voters, the next three columns to white voters. January 1 and July 1 are omitted because they are extreme outliers in voter density, likely because they are common placeholders in legacy voter registration systems; 1952 was a leap year. Race is imputed by past and current first, middle, and last names by L2 (Rosenman et al., 2023). Panel B is restricted to registered voters in the six states where most voters report their race – AL, FL, GA, LA, NC, and SC – who themselves report their race. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered by month-day.

Source: L2 Voter Database.

Table 2: The Vietnam Draft and Minority Veterans' Racial Integration and Political Identity

	White Spouse	Minority Share in Block (%)	Registered Party: Dem. Rep.	
Panel A: Baseline Lottery Estimates				
VDL Status	0.34 (0.16)	-0.19 (0.11)	-0.14 (0.13)	0.27 (0.10)
$\bar{Y}$	8.2	55.0	85.6	7.4
N	136,901	265,100	269,574	269,574
Wald Est.	3.58 (1.70)	-1.97 (1.15)	-1.52 (1.35)	2.92 (1.12)
Panel B: Placebo Lottery Estimates (Post-VDL Cohorts)				
Placebo VDL Status	-0.02 (0.16)	0.08 (0.10)	-0.08 (0.13)	0.10 (0.09)
$\bar{Y}$	8.8	54.9	85.4	7.1
N	157,993	315,877	321,200	321,200
Panel C: Lottery Estimates Among Residents of the South				
VDL Status	0.52 (0.19)	-0.26 (0.15)	-0.33 (0.17)	0.57 (0.14)
$\bar{Y}$	7.2	54.6	83.4	9.1
N	94,671	168,825	172,358	172,358
Panel D: Lottery Estimates Among Voters with No Imputed Data				
VDL Status	0.45 (0.23)	-0.19 (0.21)	-0.39 (0.34)	0.20 (0.20)
$\bar{Y}$	4.9	55.1	85.0	4.5
N	48,668	88,488	48,232	48,232
$\gamma_{my} + \delta_{md}$	X	X	X	X
County FE		X		

Note: OLS regressions of an indicator for being married to a white spouse in 2022, the minority share of 2022 residential block, or the registered political party on whether the person's birthday was eligible for the Vietnam Draft Lottery. All regressions include year-month and month-day fixed effects; Census Block regressions include county fixed effects to isolate local variation. The first column is restricted to voters with a spouse; the second column is restricted to voters who reside at geolocated addresses. **Panel A** is restricted to registered Black or Native American (minority) male voters born in 1950–1952; race is imputed by past and current first, middle, and last names by L2 (Rosenman et al., 2023). The panel also presents scaled Wald estimators for the effect of Vietnam War conscription – maintaining the exclusion restriction that outcomes are only affected via conscription – using the veteran status estimates of Angrist and Chen (2011), Table 2. **Panel B** is restricted to registered minority male voters born in 1953–1955, assigning VDL status as if each voter were born exactly three years earlier. **Panel C** restricts each baseline model to residents of the former Jim Crow South. **Panel D** instead restricts each baseline model to registered voters in AL, FL, GA, LA, NC, and SC who report their race; ‘white spouse’ is defined as having a spouse who reports being white; and ‘Democrat’ and ‘Republican’ are restricted to states where political party membership is directly observed. Wald estimators are not presented in Panels C and D because there is no available estimate of first-stage veteran status for Southern residents. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered by birth date. Source: L2 Voter Database and the 2020 US Census.

Table 3: The Vietnam Draft and Minority Veterans' Economic Standing

	Avg. Zip Code AGI (log \$)	Imputed (log \$): Income	Wealth	Some Components of Imputed Income/Wealth			
				Home Value (log \$)	Own Home (%)	Log Sq. Ft.: Lot	Home
Panel A: Baseline Lottery Estimates							
VDL Status	0.001 (0.002)	0.008 (0.003)	0.003 (0.005)	0.007 (0.003)	0.10 (0.20)	0.005 (0.006)	0.007 (0.003)
$\bar{Y}$	10.9	10.9	11.3	12.2	49.6	9.3	7.5
N	268,729	262,207	165,753	262,490	269,574	206,263	194,046
Wald Est.	0.0086 (0.0171)	0.086 (0.030)	0.032 (0.054)	0.076 (0.035)	1.1 (2.2)	0.056 (0.060)	0.077 (0.027)
Panel B: Placebo Lottery Estimates (Post-VDL Cohorts)							
Placebo VDL Status	-0.004 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.005)	0.002 (0.003)	-0.24 (0.20)	0.004 (0.005)	0.001 (0.002)
$\bar{Y}$	10.9	10.9	11.3	12.2	46.7	9.3	7.4
N	320,242	311,736	188,820	311,938	321,200	242,824	228,103
$\gamma_{my} + \delta_{md}$	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

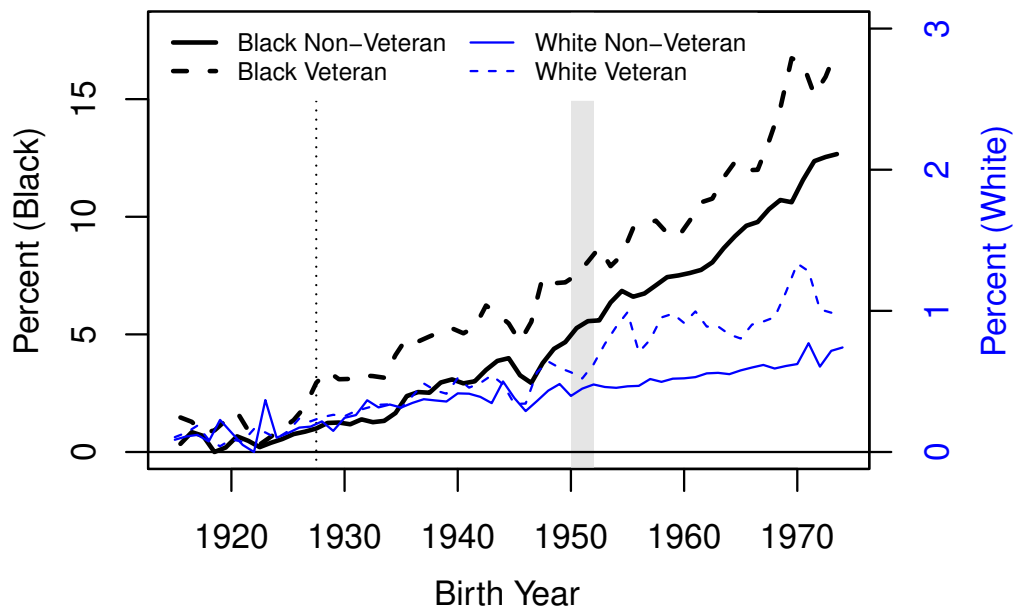
Note: OLS regressions of the average 2021 adjusted gross income of households in the residential Zip code, L2-imputed income or wealth, and several L2-reported household features used to construct imputed income and wealth (estimated current retail market value of home, predicted homeownership indicator, and the square footage of the residential address's lot and dwelling) on whether the person's birthday was eligible for the Vietnam Draft Lottery. All regressions include year-month and month-day fixed effects. The first column is restricted to voters with a Zip code; the remaining columns are restricted to observations where each variable is reported by L2. **Panel A** is restricted to registered Black or Native American (minority) male voters born in 1950–1952; race is imputed by past and current first, middle, and last names by L2 (Rosenman et al., 2023). The panel also presents scaled Wald estimators for the effect of Vietnam War conscription – maintaining the exclusion restriction that outcomes are only affected via conscription – using the veteran status estimates of Angrist and Chen (2011), Table 2. **Panel B** is restricted to registered minority male voters born in 1953–1955, assigning VDL status as if each voter were born exactly three years earlier. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered by birth date. Source: L2 Voter Database, IRS SOI, and the 2020 US Census.

Table 4: The Vietnam Draft and White Veterans' Racial Integration, Politics, and Economic Standing

	Minority Spouse	Minority Share in Block (%)	Registered Party: Dem.	Rep.	Avg. Zip Code AGI (log \$)	Imputed (log \$): Income	Wealth
Panel A: Baseline Lottery Estimates							
VDL Status	0.009 (0.013)	0.005 (0.015)	0.013 (0.063)	0.016 (0.067)	-0.0018 (0.0007)	0.0016 (0.0008)	0.0033 (0.0014)
$\bar{Y}$	0.7	7.5	31.8	48.4	11.4	11.3	11.9
N	1,800,526	2,576,572	2,638,821	2,638,821	2,609,439	2,565,929	1,914,765
Wald Est.	0.06 (0.09)	0.03 (0.10)	0.09 (0.44)	0.11 (0.46)	-0.012 (0.005)	0.0113 (0.0057)	0.023 (0.010)
Panel B: Placebo Lottery Estimates (Post-VDL Cohorts)							
Placebo VDL Status	0.021 (0.013)	0.012 (0.016)	0.045 (0.060)	-0.068 (0.062)	0.00062 (0.00065)	-0.0002 (0.0008)	-0.0002 (0.0014)
$\bar{Y}$	0.8	7.7	30.2	49.4	11.4	11.3	11.9
N	1,978,697	2,875,816	2,947,486	2,947,486	2,916,218	2,863,915	2,116,001
Panel C: Lottery Estimates Among Voters with No Imputed Data							
VDL Status	0.010 (0.027)	-0.051 (0.041)	-0.208 (0.155)	0.593 (0.166)	-0.0023 (0.0017)	-0.0007 (0.0019)	0.0006 (0.0034)
$\bar{Y}$	0.6	10.1	26.1	48.5	11.3	11.2	11.9
N	334,061	470,983	323,873	323,873	477,912	469,950	304,620
$\gamma_{my} + \delta_{md}$	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
County FE		X					

Note: OLS regressions of an indicator for being married to a minority spouse in 2022, the minority share of 2022 residential block, the registered political party, the average 2021 adjusted gross income of households in the residential Zip code, or L2-imputed income or wealth on whether the person's birthday was eligible for the Vietnam Draft Lottery. All regressions include year-month and month-day fixed effects; Census Block regressions include county fixed effects to isolate local variation. The first column is restricted to voters with a spouse; the second to voters who reside at geolocated addresses; the fifth to voters with a Zip code; and the sixth and seventh to voters with imputed income or wealth. **Panel A** is restricted to registered *white* male voters born in 1950–1952; race is imputed by L2 (Rosenman et al., 2023). The panel also presents scaled Wald estimators for the effect of Vietnam War conscription – maintaining the exclusion restriction that outcomes are only affected via conscription – using the veteran status estimates of Angrist and Chen (2011), Table 2. **Panel B** is restricted to white male voters born in 1953–1955, assigning VDL status as if each were born exactly three years earlier. **Panel C** is restricted to voters in AL, FL, GA, LA, NC, and SC who report their race; ‘minority spouse’ is defined as having a spouse who reports being Black or Native American; and ‘Democrat’ and ‘Republican’ are restricted to states where membership is observed. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered by birth date. Source: L2 Voter Database and the 2020 US Census.

Figure 1: Interracial Marriage at Middle Age by Race and Veteran Status



Note: The percent of married male Black (left axis) and white (right axis) veterans and non-veterans between ages 45–55 who were married to white and Black spouses, respectively, conditional on having a spouse and by birth cohort. The dotted line at the 1928 cohort indicates the first year in which a sizable share (at least 5 percent) of men served in Korea, and thus in an integrated military. The 1950–1952 cohorts are shaded. Spouses are identified by reported relationships on survey forms (Ruggles et al., 2018). White respondents and spouses exclude Hispanics. Black series are two-year moving averages. Source: US Census and American Community Survey (Ruggles et al., 2018).