WHO WERE THE ISOLATIONISTS?*

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Abstract

The interwar isolationist movement constrained US governments from intervening to deter Fascist aggression. But what motivated this movement? We digitize archival records relating to 24,000 donors to the America First Committee, the largest isolationist group, which we merge into the 1940 US Census. German immigrants, especially those with stronger German identities as measured by naming and intermarriage, made up the rank and file of America First. We find little evidence that sectoral economic interests drove isolationism. These results indicate the importance of immigrant diasporas for foreign policy. Underscoring the link between German identity and isolationism, we find that German immigrants resident in counties with higher First World War casualties, which stimulated anti-German discrimination, had weaker German identities by 1940 and were less likely to donate. Isolationism was not born of isolation.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The interwar US isolationist movement had profound consequences for world history. The US emerged from the First World War a pre-eminent military power and global creditor, but voters elected a series of Republican administrations promising a "Return to normalcy" after the wartime intervention, and the Senate vetoed membership of the League of Nations. Throughout the 1930s, the Roosevelt administration was hesitant to intervene in European politics, only abandoning a policy of strict neutrality after the German invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1939 (Kupchan, 2020). The absence of the US undermined efforts by Britain, France, Poland and Czechoslovakia to deter Fascist aggression. In the judgement of Divine (1965, 55), "American isolationism became the handmaiden of European appeasement."

Historians explain the United States' sluggish reaction to Fascist military activities in the 1930s and 1940s in terms of powerful isolationist sentiment among the American public. In 1937 negotiations with the British government, Roosevelt complained that he could not risk "to be made, in popular opinion at home, a tail to the British kite" (Kennedy, 1999). An American diplomat in 1939 reported the common perception in Europe "that American public opinion will not tolerate any other than an attitude of the most rigid neutrality" (Kennedy, 1999). This perception was justified: even after Germany invaded Poland, most Americans opposed involvement in the conflict in Europe. In a Fortune (1939) poll, 86% of Americans responded affirmatively to "Should we tend strictly to our business and go to war only to defend our own country from attack?"

The interwar isolationist movement is of interest beyond its impact on US foreign policy. The largest isolationist pressure group, the America First Committee, formed in September 1940 to coordinate anti-interventionist activities, attracted an estimated 800,000 members in over 450 chapters (Cole, 1953). The scale of the movement is notable given that foreign policy issues infrequently provide the basis for mass politics (De Vries, Hobolt and Walter, 2021). The isolationist rhetoric of "America First" has been a recurrent feature of the political right,

from Pat Buchanan to Donald Trump (Dodson and Brooks, 2022). The recent resurgence of isolationism on the right—coupled with the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the risk of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan—threatens global stability. Studying isolationism in the interwar period can help illustrate the mechanisms contributing to isolationism now.

Why was isolationism so popular? There are two prevailing explanations. One perspective emphasizes economic interests (Trubowitz, 1998; Narizny, 2007; Frieden, 1988). Sectors which relied on domestic demand saw little benefit from foreign intervention and supported isolationism, while exporting sectors pushed for intervention. The alternative perspective emphasizes ethnic identity: immigrants from the axis powers mobilized against intervention (Berinsky, 2009). Other scholarship focuses on the negative effects of the First World War, and on the popularity of isolationism in rural areas (Smuckler, 1953; Doenecke, 1990). These theories resonate in debates about isolationism in the present. Kupchan and Trubowitz (2021, 92) argue that "An 'America First' approach to the world sells well when many Americans ... feel that they have been on the losing end of globalization." The sectoral account implies that in order to create broad political coalitions around international engagement, governments need to convince voters that the benefits from upholding the international order will flow through to them.

This debate has been constrained by a lack of data. Several historians have examined the writings of isolationist elites (Cole, 1953; Doenecke, 1990). This approach can tell us that the isolationist camp contained a wide range of people—"farmers, union leaders, wealthy industrialists, college students, newspaper publishers, wealthy patricians, and newly arrived immigrants" (Dunn, 2013, 57)—but not the different propensities to join of these groups. A number of studies use the behavior of Members of Congress as a proxy for isolationist activity among their constituents (Smuckler, 1953; Rieselbach, 1960; Trubowitz, 1998). While of interest in its own right, congressional behavior is an imperfect measure of constituent opinion. Members of Congress respond to multiple pressures, and may not face an electoral sanction for being out of step with their constituents on foreign policy issues (Page and

Bouton, 2006). Other literature examines isolationism among political and economic elites (Frieden, 1988; Trubowitz, 1998), generating theories that may or may not apply to mass isolationism. The most sophisticated contribution to date is Berinsky (2009)'s analysis of early public opinion polls. That analysis is limited to variables included on those polls, and relies on re-weighting surveys that predate modern sampling methods (Berinsky, 2006). As those polls contain little information on industry or geography, one cannot use them to test sectoral theories.

In this article we digitize a trove of archival records to shed light on the support base of the largest isolationist group: The America First Committee. The Hoover Archive acquired the papers of America First shortly after the group disbanded following Pearl Harbor. These records include lists of the names and addresses of all donors contributing $1 or more, and the results of a survey of the organizations chapters. We digitize records for almost 24,000 donors—close to the universe of donors, Cole (1953) claims 25,000—and 452 chapters. We merge the individual donor records into the 1940 US census microdata. While we require an individual to be uniquely identified in the census to merge, the fine-grained geographic data contained in the donor records affords us a higher match rate than other studies. We also geocode the chapter locations and allocate them to counties.

Two features of this data make it especially useful for disambiguating between theories of isolationism. First, donation to America First is attractive as a measure of isolationism because it is costly and thus gauges intense preferences. Those with stronger isolationist preferences would more likely condition their vote on foreign policy, and so would feature more heavily in the calculations of vote-maximizing politicians. Second, the census contains detailed information on national origin, naming and marriage, which can be used to study ethnic identity, and on industry of employment and geography, which can be used to study sectoral interests at both the individual and local level. The extreme granularity of the census data helps us address the key limitation that donation may be influenced by other factors that influence political participation, not isolationism. We compare individuals to those with

extremely similar socioeconomic status and location.

The strongest predictor of support for America First is German-American heritage. Those born in Germany were five times as likely to donate as the overall population, a result that is robust to comparing German-born individuals to residents of the same county with the same income, education, age, race and sex. Support among other immigrant groups follows alignment in the Second World War: British, Polish, and Russian immigrants were less likely to donate to America First, though the estimated coefficients are smaller in magnitude than that for Germans. Among German-Americans, those with stronger German identities, as measured by intermarriage and children's names, were more likely to donate.

To gain more causal leverage on the relationship between German identity and isolationism, we examine the effects of the First World War. Fouka (2019) illustrates how mass discrimination during the First World War increased assimilation among German-Americans. Ferrara and Fishback (2022) show that at the county level, First World War casualties increased anti-German discrimination and German out-migration. Conditional on enlistment, casualties were likely determined by battlefield factors unrelated to features of the counties. Using a linked sample from the 1910 and 1940 censuses, we show that German immigrants resident before the First World War in counties with higher casualty rates had weaker German identities in 1940. They were also less likely to donate to America First, suggesting that this identity change influenced isolationism. We find no evidence of an effect among non-Germans resident in the same counties.

These results are consistent with a model of isolationism based on German identity. Analyses of social identity in politics work from the assumptions that people care about the wellbeing of their identity group, take actions consistent with group norms, and avoid identifying with low-status groups (Tajfel and Turner, 2004; Akerlof and Kranton, 2000; Shayo, 2009; Sambanis, Skaperdas and Wohlforth, 2015). We would expect German-Americans who identified strongly as German to place more weight on the welfare of Germany and oppose intervention against Germany. The negative shock to German status posed by discrimination

during the First World War would have decreased identification with Germany as well as observable adherence to German cultural practices. Those most exposed to wartime discrimination would have placed less weight on Germany, and would have been less supportive of isolationism. Our research design also allows us to rule out alternative theories of German isolationism, such as concerns that intervention would spark anti-German discrimination, or pessimism about the costs of intervention. Both these mechanisms would predict a positive association between First World War casualties and isolationism.

We find little evidence to support sectoral theories of isolationism. If anything, we find that those employed in industries with positive net exports were more likely to donate, though that result is not robust to the addition of controls. Across a wide range of specifications—comparing sectoral employment at the individual and county level, subsetting by region, and examining specific manufacturing industries—we do not observe clear patterns of sectoral alignment over isolationism. A notable exception is that those employed in the financial sector, which was predicted to favor intervention, were 1.5 times more likely to donate, as estimated in our most restrictive specification. We also find evidence against the claims that isolationism was popular among rural residents (Smuckler, 1953) or veterans (Doenecke, 1990).

The paper makes three contributions. First, we bring new data to the longstanding debate on the isolationist movement. Our evidence bolsters interpretations based on ethnic ties (Berinsky, 2009), and offers a corrective to the popular impression, perhaps generated by the adoption of the "America First" slogan by Buchanan and Trump as well as by the anti-Semitism of some of its members, that interwar isolationism was a nativist movement. Our analysis also suggests a different and more nuanced relationship between economic sectors and foreign policy preferences than that suggested by existing scholarship.

Second, the paper extends the broader literature on immigrant diasporas and foreign policy (Berinsky, 2009; Shain, 1994; Saideman, 2001; Mearsheimer and Walt, 2007; Prather, 2020; Prasad and Savatic, 2021). This literature has documented the propensity of immigrants, especially those with ties to their home countries, to mobilize over foreign policy issues

(Berinsky, 2009; Prather, 2020), and analyzed the workings of specific lobbies (Haney and Vanderbush, 1999). We contribute by moving beyond the descriptive link between immigrants and foreign policy activity to pinpoint the role of identity. Our results also provide direct evidence against Huntington (1997, 32–33)'s claim that immigrant mobilization over foreign policy is solely attributable to post-1965 immigration "changing the racial, religious, and ethnic makeup of the United States."

Third, the paper contributes to the extensive literature on public opinion and foreign policy (Almond, 1950; Holsti, 2004; Urbatsch, 2010; Kertzer, 2013) by introducing archival digitization and record-linkage as a methodological alternative to the survey methods generally used. Doing so allows us to examine a broader range of variables, flexibly control for key covariates to make it more plausible that our estimates are driven by the variable of interest, and leverage exogenous variation in slow-moving variables like identity to trace out causal relationships.[1]

The remainder of the article proceeds as follows. The next section provides more information on the America First Committee. Section 3 discusses theories of isolationism in the interwar period. Section 4 discusses the archival sources, digitization, and record linking procedure. Section 5 provides the empirical strategy and evidence, 6 concludes.

2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The America First Committee was founded in September 1940 "to coordinate the activities and messaging of disparate isolationist voices and bodies" Kupchan (2020). Isolationists were motivated to organize at this point in time by the perception that they were losing the debate over intervention. The German conquest of Denmark, France, and Belgium coincided with a sharp rise in support among the American public for sending aid to England (Berinsky et al., 2011). Founded by students at Yale Law School, the committee moved to Chicago in July 1940, where it was headed by General Robert E. Wood, chairman of Sears Roebuck. It

[1]The paper also contributes to a growing literature that uses historical microdata to study conflict (Hall, Huff and Kuriwaki, 2019; Huff and Schub, 2021; Koehler-Derrick and Lee, 2023).

remained in Chicago until the committee's dissolution shortly after the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

The America First Committee released dozens of "Did You Know?" position papers to be distributed by local chapters and arranged 126 public addresses (Doenecke, 1990). This messaging all drove home the point that the United States should not involve itself in foreign affairs. America First advanced many arguments in service of this conclusion: that Germany did not pose a credible threat to the United States, that Nazi domination of Europe need not disrupt the American way of life, that a war effort would quash small businesses who could not compete for defense contracts or whose supply chains would languish. The America First Committee was a true single-issue organization; Doenecke (1990) writes that it "never supplemented foreign policy with any domestic program."

America First attracted a mass membership that was not reflective of its elite leaders. At its dissolution, according to Doenecke (1990), America First had 450 units and "at least a quarter of a million members;" Cole (1953) and Olson (2013) estimate the America First Committee's peak membership closer to 800,000 and "almost a million," respectively. In a 1941 Gallup poll, 16% of respondents reported that they would have voted for America First Committee figures Charles Lindbergh, Burton Wheeler, or Gerald Nye if they had run in the 1940 presidential election (Cole, 1953; Doenecke, 1990). The committee was founded more as a publicity organization than a quasi-political party. Doenecke (1990) writes "national headquarters could not always exercise the needed supervision" over local chapters because "mass membership was thrust upon a woefully unprepared leadership."

3 THEORIES OF INTERWAR ISOLATIONISM

Who were these isolationists, and what factors motivated isolationism in this period? This section discusses existing theories of the composition of the isolationist movement, and the differing appraisals of the costs and benefits of isolationism that accounted for this composition.

Berinsky (2009) focuses on the importance of ethnic affinities. Using surveys from the era, he shows that immigrants from the Axis powers were more opposed to isolationism, and those from the Allied powers were more supportive of interventionism. In Berinsky's account, group affinities provide heuristics: "individuals rely on attachments to and dislike of domestic political groups to reach political decisions" (132). Thus German-Americans were more skeptical of the idea that a German victory posed a threat to the US, and attitudes to other groups also correlated with opinion on intervention: Germanophiles and anti-Semites opposed intervention. This attention to ethnic identity and ethnocentrism is mirrored in the historical literature. Olson (2013) suggests that the large German- and Irish-American communities—who were hostile to Britain—explain the local strength of isolationism in Chicago. America First was known to attract support from anti-Semites. Charles Lindbergh gave an anti-Semitic speech at an America First event in September 1941 (Dunn, 2013).

Note however that there are a number of other mechanisms through which group membership could influence isolationism. German immigrants were subjected to vicious discrimination during the First World War; Axis immigrants may have opposed intervention to avoid the recurrence of wartime discrimination. German immigrants who identified with and cared about the welfare of Germany would have been motivated to oppose intervention. Admiration for Germany could lead people to over-estimate German military prowess and the costs of intervening against Germany.

An alternative perspective, largely based on analyses of the behavior of political and economic elites, holds that sectoral economic divisions defined the debate over intervention (Trubowitz, 1998; Narizny, 2007). Exporting industries feared that German victory in the war would close off important markets to the US. Frieden (1988) emphasizes the importance of finance and multinational corporations based in the Northeast, Trubowitz (1998) manufacturing interests in the same region and Southern agriculture. In contrast, for industries that relied on domestic markets, especially Midwestern manufacturing and agriculture, the costs of nonintervention were lower. Studying a slightly later period, Fordham (2008) also argues

that export orientation is predictive of support for foreign intervention. Doenecke (1990) notes that America First received more donations from manufacturers relative to finance, communications, and transportation. Except Fordham's, these analyses focus on the behavior of political and economic elites. It is an open question whether the factors that motivated mass isolationism were the same as those motivating elites.

A different explanation, focusing on perceptions of the risk posed by Germany, shares this focus on geography. Much of the early literature on isolationism tried to explain its popularity in the Midwest. Smuckler (1953) characterized isolationism as a rural movement. Rieselbach (1960) summarized this literature as claiming that physical isolation from Europe created a sense of security that negated the need for American interventionism abroad, a perspective echoed in recent historiography. Dunn (2013, 57) also points to isolationist success in the "inland, insulated Midwest." This concept of rural isolationism is important to examine given scholarship on a more recent link between rural identity and isolationism (Johnson and Scala, 2020).

The theories discussed above focus on disagreement about the relative benefits of intervention. An alternative source of disagreement on isolationism concerned the human costs of intervention. Doenecke (1990) suggests that trauma from the First World War may have allowed isolationist groups to win over war-weary veterans and their families, and notes that the America First Committee worked deliberately to recruit veterans. Olson (2013) concurs, noting that isolationist messaging "pointed to the aftermath of World War I as proof of its validity."

All the above accounts note a correlation between partisanship and isolationism. Berinsky (2009) documents a partisan divide in support for intervention.[2] The Republican Party was the more isolationist of the two, and so even if there was no causal effect of party affiliation or ideology on isolationism, we would expect to observe a correlation between isolationism and party. Nonetheless, there are two distinct mechanisms through which party and ideology

[2]Partisanship also features prominently in analyses of isolationist public opinion in other eras (Holsti, 2004; Urbatsch, 2010).

Table 1: Observations by Region

Region	US Census	Donors	Merged	Chapters
Midwest	40,208,516	10,671	6,437	234
Northeast	36,033,786	7,703	4,416	124
South	41,740,440	1,535	1,144	20
West	13,921,169	3,751	2,516	74
Total	131,903,911	23,660	14,513	452

could influence isolationism. First, Doenecke (1990) notes that economic conservatives feared that war would increase the involvement of the government in the economy. Second, elite cues may have influenced public opinion (Berinsky, 2009).

Divisions over isolationism—the existing literature argues—fell along ethnic, sectoral, geographical, and partisan lines, and between veterans and non-veterans. While some of these theories were developed explicitly with reference to the mass public, others refer to elites or rely on impressionistic evidence. In the remainder of the paper we present data on isolationists to examine these competing theories.

4 DATA

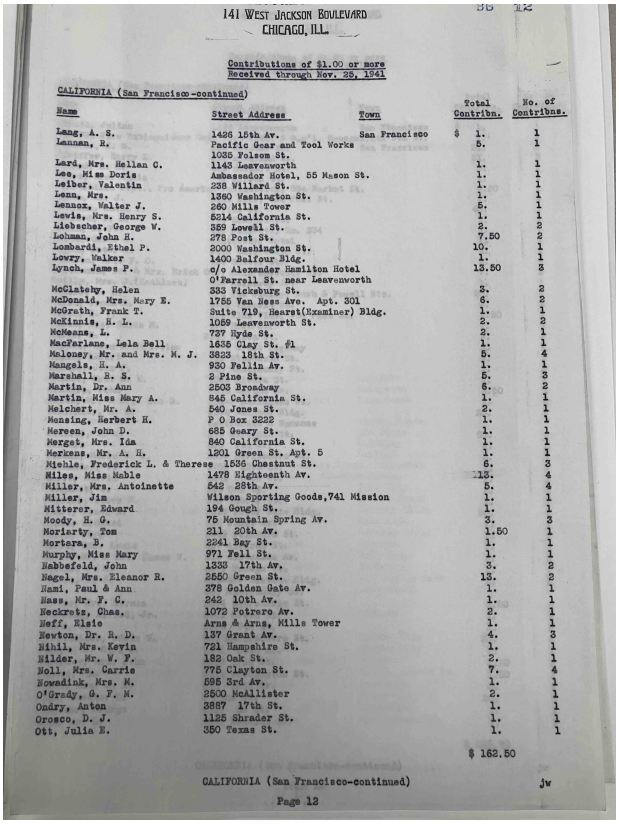
This section describes the data we use in our empirical analysis. We conduct our main analysis at the individual level, combining donor-level data from the America First Committee's administrative records (discussed in subsection 4.1) and data from the de-anonymized 1940 full-count US Census (Ruggles et al., 2021). We begin with a spine of all individuals in the Census and all individuals from the America First Committee donor records, merging individual records across data sets using a procedure described in subsection 4.2. In addition to the variables available in the 1940 full-count Census, we use several additional covariates which we describe in subsection 4.3.

4.1 *Archival Material*

Shortly after the America First Committee's dissolution in December 1941, many of its documents—including pamphlets, internal communications, and financial records—were deposited in the Hoover Institution Archive.[3] This project digitizes two sets of documents: sheets of America First Committee donor records (Figure 1A) and the results of an internal census in which chapters were asked to report their number of members (Figure 1B). We made several in-person visits to the Hoover Institution Archive in Stanford, California during which we photographed the paper records.

Figure 1: Examples of America First Committee digitized records

A. Donor-level records, San Francisco



141 West Jackson Boulevard
Chicago, Ill.

Contributions of $1.00 or more
Received through Nov. 25, 1941

CALIFORNIA (San Francisco-continued)

Name	Street Address	Town	Total Contribn.	No. of Contribns.
Lang, A. S.	1426 15th Av.	San Francisco	$ 1.	1
Lannan, R.	Pacific Gear and Tool Works		5.	1
	1035 Folsom St.			
Lard, Mrs. Hellan C.	1143 Leavenworth		1.	1
Lee, Miss Doris	Ambassador Hotel, 55 Mason St.		1.	1
Leiber, Valentin	238 Willard St.		1.	1
Lenn, Mrs.	1360 Washington St.		1.	1
Lennox, Walter J.	260 Mills Tower		5.	1
Lewis, Mrs. Henry S.	5214 California St.		1.	1
Liebscher, George W.	389 Lowell St.		2.	2
Lohman, John H.	278 Post St.		7.50	2
Lombardi, Ethel P.	2000 Washington St.		10.	1
Lowry, Walker	1400 Balfour Bldg.		1.	1
Lynch, James P.	c/o Alexander Hamilton Hotel		13.50	3
	O'Farrell St. near Leavenworth			
McClatchy, Helen	333 Vicksburg St.		3.	2
McDonald, Mrs. Mary E.	1755 Van Ness Ave. Apt. 301		6.	2
McGrath, Frank T.	Suite 719, Hearst(Examiner) Bldg.		1.	1
McKinnis, E. L.	1069 Leavenworth St.		2.	2
McMeans, L.	737 Hyde St.		2.	1
MacFarlane, Lela Bell	1635 Clay St. #1		1.	1
Maloney, Mr. and Mrs. M. J.	3823 18th St.		5.	4
Mangels, R. A.	930 Fellin Av.		1.	1
Marshall, R. S.	2 Pine St.		5.	3
Martin, Dr. Ann	2503 Broadway		6.	2
Martin, Miss Mary A.	845 California St.		1.	1
Melchert, Mr. A.	540 Jones St.		2.	1
Mensing, Herbert H.	P O Box 3222		1.	1
Mereen, John D.	685 Geary St.		1.	1
Merget, Mrs. Ida	840 California St.		1.	1
Merkens, Mr. A. H.	1201 Green St. Apt. 5		1.	1
Miehle, Frederick L. & Therese	1536 Chestnut St.		6.	3
Miles, Miss Mable	1478 Eighteenth Av.		13.	4
Miller, Mrs. Antoinette	542 28th Av.		5.	4
Miller, Jim	Wilson Sporting Goods,741 Mission		1.	1
Mitterer, Edward	194 Gough St.		1.	1
Moody, H. G.	75 Mountain Spring Av.		3.	3
Moriarty, Tom	211 20th Av.		1.50	1
Mortera, B.	2241 Bay St.		1.	1
Murphy, Miss Mary	971 Fell St.		1.	1
Nabbefeld, John	1333 17th Av.		3.	2
Nagel, Mrs. Eleanor R.	2550 Green St.		13.	2
Nami, Paul & Ann	378 Golden Gate Av.		1.	1
Nass, Mr. F. C.	242 10th Av.		1.	1
Neckretz, Chas.	1072 Potrero Av.		2.	1
Neff, Elsie	Arms & Arms, Mills Tower		1.	1
Newton, Dr. R. D.	137 Grant Av.		4.	3
Nihil, Mrs. Kevin	721 Hampshire St.		1.	1
Nilder, Mr. W. F.	182 Oak St.		2.	1
Noll, Mrs. Carrie	775 Clayton St.		7.	4
Nowadnik, Mrs. M.	595 3rd Av.		1.	1
O'Grady, G. F. M.	2500 McAllister		2.	1
Ondry, Anton	3887 17th St.		1.	1
Orosco, D. J.	1125 Shrader St.		1.	1
Ott, Julia E.	350 Texas St.		1.	1
			$ 162.50	

CALIFORNIA (San Francisco-continued) jw

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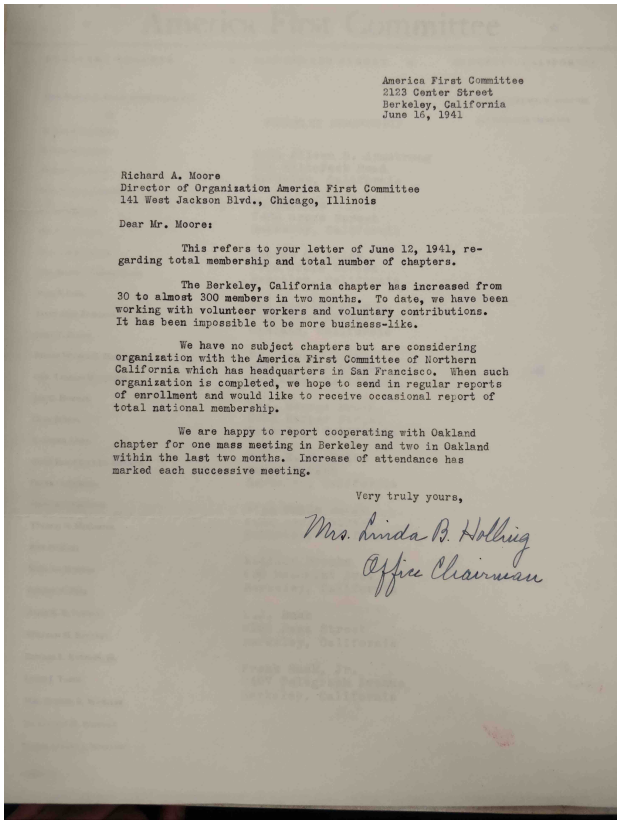
B. Berkeley chapter response to internal census



America First Committee
2123 Center Street
Berkeley, California
June 16, 1941

Richard A. Moore
Director of Organization America First Committee
141 West Jackson Blvd., Chicago, Illinois

Dear Mr. Moore:

This refers to your letter of June 12, 1941, regarding total membership and total number of chapters.

The Berkeley, California chapter has increased from 30 to almost 300 members in two months. To date, we have been working with volunteer workers and voluntary contributions. It has been impossible to be more business-like.

We have no subject chapters but are considering organization with the America First Committee of Northern California which has headquarters in San Francisco. When such organization is completed, we hope to send in regular reports of enrollment and would like to receive occasional report of total national membership.

We are happy to report cooperating with Oakland chapter for one mass meeting in Berkeley and two in Oakland within the last two months. Increase of attendance has marked each successive meeting.

Very truly yours,

Mrs. Linda B. Holling
Office Chairman

As panel A shows, donor records include last names, given names or initials, street addresses, cumulative total amounts donated, and number of times donated through a date

[3]Herbert Hoover was a noted supporter of the organization (Doenecke, 1990; Olson, 2013).

noted at the top of each sheet. Dates covered by the donor records range from late November to early December 1941, weeks before the organization's dissolution upon the bombing of Pearl Harbor. This data thus provides a comprehensive picture of the America First Committee's donor profile.

Panel B, in turn, shows the America First Berkeley chapter's response to the census conducted in the summer of 1941 by the central branch in Chicago. While not as late as the donor level records, the census was conducted after the membership surge in the spring of 1941 which followed Charles Lindbergh joining the organization (Olson, 2013). The information reported in chapter-level responses is more variable than in the donor records: some chapters reported only the names and addresses of their officers; others responded with full rosters. We therefore use the presence of a chapter in a county as an alternative dependent variable to our main measure of individual donor status.

The donor records include a number of notable individuals. The architect Frank Lloyd Wright donated, as did the First World War veteran and Anglo Saxon scholar, Francis P. Magoun. Before he planned the Bay of Pigs landing, the future CIA official Richard M. Bissell Jr. took a presumably more skeptical view of American intervention abroad; his name appears in our records. Legal scholar and conservative activist Clarence Manion was a donor, as was the mother of William F. Buckley Jr., and H.W. Eliot Jr., brother of the more famous T.S. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the German-American Senator Karl Mundt, and Hamilton Fish, a noted supporter of isolationism in Congress, both appear in the America First donor records. The backgrounds of these prominent supporters—social elites, veterans, and conservatives—match those of other noted isolationists who feature in the historical literature on America First, such as future presidents Ford and Kennedy (Doenecke, 1990). Yet famous architects, politicians, and spies are unlikely to be representative of the thousands of more-ordinary donors. It is only by linking these donors to other data that we can examine the mass basis of the isolationist movement.

4.2 *Details on Merge*

We use the information regarding names and residences in the donor records to merge them into the 1940 US Census. We first process the data by matching towns to those recorded in the census, by geocoding towns and allocating them to counties, and by standardizing names and street addresses. We separate first and last names, remove common titles, such as "Mr.," re-lengthen commonly abbreviated names, changing "Wm." to "William," and split out the first given name. For street addresses, we remove address numbers, lengthen common abbreviations, and drop punctuation. This process gives us a dataset of first names, the first word of the first names, last name, street, town, county, and state for the donors. We run the same processing on the names and addresses in the census data, with the addition of separately identifying each person's initials, as some of our donor records only provide initials.

Our merging algorithm uses different combinations of these variables in sequence. Table B-7 provides the full list and ordering of variables merged on. The basic idea is that we first try and find exact merges—people with the same name resident in the same state, county, or town, of the donors. In each merge we require matches to be unique within the pool, and after each merge remove those merged from the pool of potential merges. After exact merges within increasingly narrow geographies, we try fuzzy merging, allowing the names and streets of donors and potential merges to differ slightly. We require a Jaro-Winkler distance of no more than 6%: in practice, merged names below this distance threshold appeared to be the same name subject to typographic errors. In the last step we exact merge allowing for merges to be resident in different states.

The addition of geographic information helps us reach a higher merge rate than comparable studies. Table 1 indicates a 61% merge rate, which is similar across regions, and compares favorably to other studies. For instance, Abramitzky et al. (2021) achieve a merge rate of 27%, albeit linking records 30 years apart.

A natural concern when analyzing merged data is that the merging algorithm may bias the

construction of the merged sample. In particular, given that we find that German-Americans were more likely to donate, one might be concerned that German-Americans, perhaps because of distinctive naming patterns, were more likely to be successfully merged into the census. Table B-8 presents linear probability model estimates of the relationships between different covariates in our donor dataset, and the probability of a successful merge. We find no relationship between how distinctive of German origin a person's first name was, and the probability of them being merged. If anything German last names are slightly negatively associated with successful merges, though this association attenuates to zero if we control for the log number of donors with a given last name. Residents of larger towns were less likely to be merged, which is to be expected given that we require individuals to be uniquely identified, and which should bias against finding that America First was less popular in rural areas. Those who donated more were more likely to be merged, possibly because the quality of record-keeping in those cases was higher. This bias motivates controlling flexibly for income.

4.3 *Additional Data*

The census provides individual-level data on a variety of social and economic outcomes, such as income, industry of employment, mother tongue, and children's names. We gauge whether an individual was employed in a net-exporting or import-competing industry using records of exports and imports at the industry level from US Department of Commerce (1951). Names provide a way to measure immigrant and national identities (Fouka, 2019; Bazzi et al., 2019). Following Fryer and Levitt (2004) and Fouka (2019), we calculate a German Name Index:

$$\text{German Name Index}_n = \frac{P(\text{German-born}|\text{name} = n)}{P(\text{German-born}|\text{name} = n) + P(\text{not German-born}|\text{name} = n)}$$

This index ranges between 0 and 1: names closer to 1 are distinctive of German immigrants. We also calculate an equivalent index for last names, as a measure of likely German heritage.

We supplement the individual-level variables with county-level data on economic and social

outcomes—population, urbanization, the foreign-born population share, the share of Lutherans among members of religious denominations, and the shares employed in manufacturing and in exporting industries. We do so using data from the censuses of population and religion (Haines and ICPSR, 2005) and the full-count census microdata (Manson et al., 2020). We use data on the presence of the German-American Bund, an organization supportive of Nazi Germany, from Wang (2021), and data on First World War enlistments and casualties from Ferrara and Fishback (2022). To examine whether individuals located prior to the First World War in counties with higher casualty rates were more likely to donate, we use census files that link individuals from the 1910 to the 1940 census from Helgertz et al. (2023).

5 EVIDENCE

In this section we examine support for America First at the individual and county level. Before estimating the relationship between specific variables and the propensity to donate, we document the incidence of these variables in the census and our merged dataset. Table 2 shows that German-Americans, whether measured in terms of place of birth, parents' place of birth, surname, or language, were over-represented in the donor dataset. While the share of individuals born in Germany in the US in 1940 was small, there was a large extended diaspora: over 10% had distinctively-German surnames, defined as those occurring at a frequency 2.3 times larger among German immigrants than among the US population. German was the most popular non-English native language in 1940. The German-American population was large enough to provide the basis for a mass isolationist movement. Rates of donation among different ethnic groups are broadly consistent with an identity-based mechanism: immigrants from the allied powers made up a smaller share of donors, and no native Yiddish speakers—who would have been Jewish—donated. Patterns by industry run against a sectoral theory: those employed in import-competing industries made up a smaller share of donors.

A simple comparison of census and donor averages indicates that donors were of higher

socioeconomic status than the overall population. This pattern is to be expected given scholarship on political participation (Brady, Verba and Schlozman, 1995). Figure 2 shows coefficients of scaled donation against levels of income and education, and shows a strong positive relationship between both variables and donation, robust to controlling for county, sex, age, race, and income or education as appropriate. Yet it is important to also note that rural and farm residents, and agricultural and manufacturing workers are represented in the donor pool at comparable rates to their frequency in the population, which makes it plausible that we can use this data to study sectoral theories. Donation was not an activity confined to social elites.

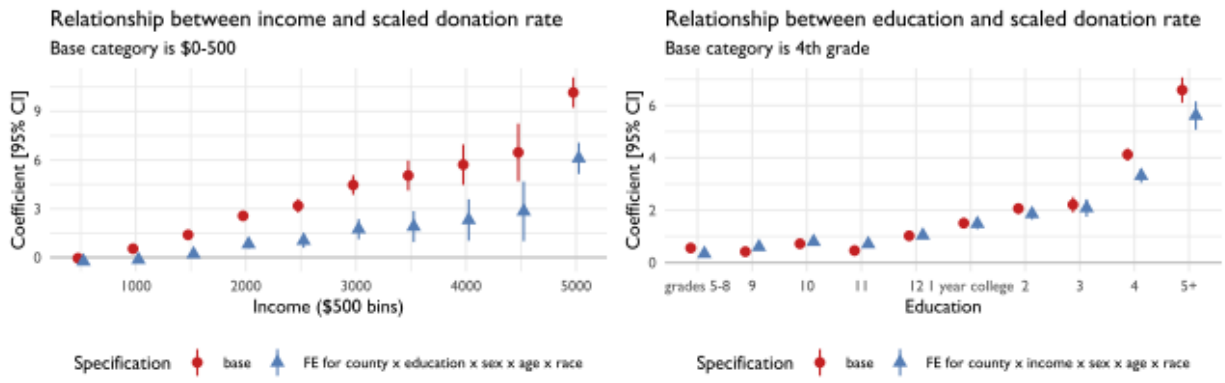


Figure 2: Relationship between income and education and donation

5.1 *Empirical Strategy*

To examine support for America First at the individual level, we estimate models of the form:

$$Donor_i = \beta X_i + \gamma_{b(i)} + \varepsilon_i \tag{1}$$

where $Donor_i$ is a binary variable that records whether individual i is present in our database. Because the average rate of donation is extremely low—we merge 24,000 donors into 130 million individuals recorded in the census—we scale this variable by dividing by the average rate of donation in the US population. A one unit change in the outcome is therefore

Table 2: Incidence of characteristics in 1940 census and merged donor dataset

Variable	Census average (%)	Donor average (%)
Born in Germany	0.944	5.443
German parent	2.332	14.391
German last name score > 0.7	10.344	31.434
Born in Ireland	0.517	0.655
Born in Italy	1.238	0.937
Born in UK	0.720	0.613
Born in Poland	0.759	0.220
Born in Russia	0.951	0.455
Born outside US	8.908	12.754
German native speaker	14.139	41.463
Yiddish native speaker	7.631	0.000
Rural	44.496	32.543
Farm household	23.151	15.083
Agriculture	18.060	14.518
Exporting industry	71.389	82.505
Manufacturing	22.635	19.817
Finance	1.001	2.779
Veteran	13.211	20.580
High school graduate	22.635	43.965
College graduate	3.477	16.152
White	89.973	98.649
Average income ($)	442.122	989.766
Average place population	19,523,078.276	14,062,544.756

This table shows the average rate of different characteristics in the 1940 census and the merged donor dataset. Averages exclude missing values; for instance Exporting Industry is the share of those in tradables industries employed in industries with positive net exports. Average income and place population are group averages, not percentages.

equivalent to a 100% increase in the rate of donation relative to the population average. X_i is the independent variable of interest, for instance an indicator for whether i was born in Germany. $\gamma_{b(i)}$ is a fixed effect for a combination of attributes pertaining to i. We estimate this model by OLS and report robust standard errors, except in cases where the assignment of the independent variable is clustered, for instance if it is the share of German-born residents in the individual's district, in which case we cluster at the level at which the independent variable is measured.

When X_i is binary, $\hat{\beta}$ corresponds to a weighted average of within-cell differences in the scaled mean rate of donating, weighting observations by within-cell variation in X_i (Angrist and Pischke, 2009). One might be concerned that our estimates are driven by differences in unobservable characteristics theoretically distinct from the independent variables of interest. In particular, we would expect age, race, and socioeconomic status to be correlated with all forms of political participation (Brady, Verba and Schlozman, 1995). This concern is especially acute when examining the relationship between economic sector and donation, given that income should vary across sectors and predict donation. Fortunately, the extremely large sample size and granular information in the census allow us to adjust flexibly for a rich set of covariates. Our preferred specification is saturated in the following covariates: age in five year increments, income in $100 increments, sex, race, education on an 11-point scale, and county. This specification compares individuals to others with the exact same bundle of characteristics in the same county.

Much of our analysis involves the relationship between immutable characteristics, such as German heritage, and isolationism. In such cases the estimand must be descriptive. As foundational work on causal inference argues, there is "no causation without manipulation" and it is unintelligible to speak of the causal effects of characteristics that cannot be manipulated (Holland, 1986). Nevertheless, it is intelligible to discuss the effects of shocks to group identity that influence the weight German-Americans placed on their German identities. We do so in Section 5.3, and distinguish this causal analysis from the descriptive analysis in the

rest of the paper.

We also examine predictors of support for America First at the county level. Our preferred specification is

$$Y_c = \beta X_c + Z_c'\gamma + \delta_{s(c)} + \varepsilon_c \tag{2}$$

Y_c is the outcome of interest in county c: the average scaled donation rate or an indicator for the presence of an America First chapter. X_c is the independent variable of interest. Z_c is a vector of controls: the log straight-line distance to Cook County Illinois—the America First Committee was based in Chicago—the foreign-born and urban population shares, and the log of county population. $\delta_{s(c)}$ is a state fixed effect and ε_c is an error term. We estimate this model by OLS and report robust standard errors.

5.2 *Results*

We first establish that German-Americans were indeed more likely to donate to America First. Table 3 reports the results of regressions of scaled donor status against measures of German-American status. Model (1) estimates the difference in mean rates of donation between German-born residents and the rest of the population: those born in Germany donated at over 5 times the rate of the total population. Model (2) shows that this result is robust to comparing German-born individuals to others with the same age, race, sex, income and education, in the same county. We emphasize that this is not evidence that all German-Americans were isolationists—the overwhelming majority did not donate. Models (3)–(5) show that this pattern holds for other proxies for German-American status: having parents born in Germany, or living in an enumeration district with a large share of native German-speakers or German immigrants. In Table A-1 we verify that the same pattern holds at the county level. Counties with more German-born residents, more Lutherans, and the presence of the Nazi-sympathizing German-American Bund, had higher rates of America First activity. That the presences of the Bund and America First are correlated is perhaps evidence of anti-Semitism feeding isolationism. The particular brand of anti-Semitism espoused by the

	America First donor (scaled)				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Born in Germany	4.810**	4.019**			
	(0.205)	(0.241)			
Parent born in Germany			2.356**		
			(0.227)		
Share German mother tongue in district				0.533**	
				(0.074)	
Share German-born in district					15.970**
					(1.394)
Controls		x	x	x	x
N	131901867	84591624	18723313	61465742	84593275
R^2	0.000	0.114	0.202	0.113	0.114

This table shows the results of individual-level regressions of America First donor status, divided by the average rate in the population, against indicators for whether the individual was born in Germany, and whether either of their parents were born in Germany, and continuous measures the share of residents in their enumeration district of residence recorded as speaking German as their mother tongue, or recorded as born in Germany. Models (2)–(5) include fixed effects for age bracket-wage bracket-sex-race-education level-county combinations. Standard errors in models (1)–(3) are robust, in(4)–(5), clustered at the enumeration district level. $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{*}p < 0.1$

Table 3: Relationship between German origins and donating to America First

Bund was of course tied up with racialized conceptions of German identity in this period.

These results are not attributable to a broader phenomenon of immigrant isolationism. Figure 3 shows coefficients and 95% confidence intervals for separate regressions of scaled donor status against indicators for different immigrant and ethnic origin. There are three results to note. First, the magnitude of the coefficient on German-born status is considerably larger than those for other immigrant groups. Second, while the historical literature suggests that Irish and Italian immigrants were supportive of isolationism—the Irish because of antipathy to the UK, the Italians because of the wartime alliance between Italy and Germany (Dunn, 2013)—those born in either country were if anything less likely to donate to America First. Third, British-, Polish- and Russian-born residents—countries at war with or occupied by Germany while the America First committee was active—were also less likely to donate, as were Yiddish-speakers.[4] The intervention debate pitted immigrants from the antagonistic

[4]Note that Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, well before America First's dissolution, and

powers against one another.

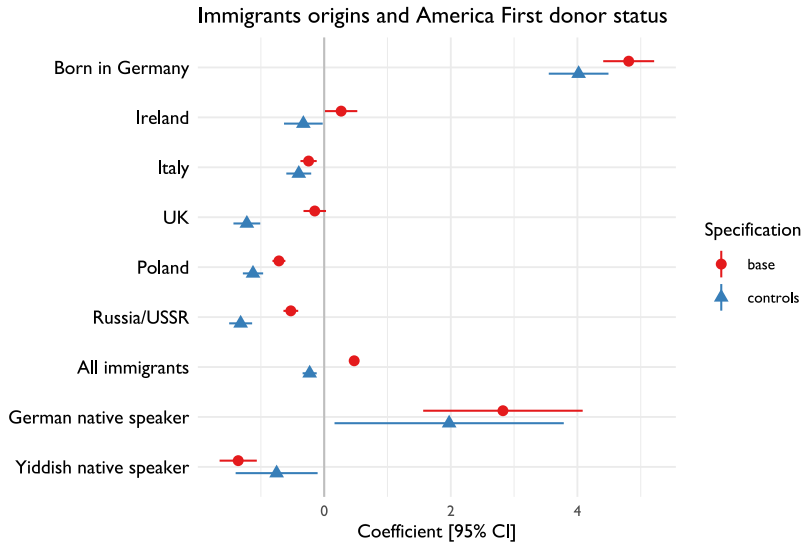


Figure 3: Relationship between different immigrant origins and donating to America First

This figure shows coefficients and 95% confidence intervals from a regression on America First donation, scaled by the base rate in the US population, against different immigrant origins. Base specification has no controls, controls specification adds fixed effects for age bracket-wage bracket-sex-race-education level-county combinations.

Among German-Americans, those with stronger cultural ties to the German community were more likely to support America First. Figure 4 plots another set of coefficients and 95% confidence intervals from regressions of America First donation against measures of German identity, subset to individuals with German Last Name Index values greater than 0.7. This sample thus includes both first generation immigrants, and much more assimilated individuals of German heritage. Measures negatively correlated with assimilation into American culture, such as having a distinctively German name, marrying another German-American, giving one's child a distinctively German name or living in an enumeration district with a high share of native German speakers, are positively associated with donation to America First. These results make sense in that those with a stronger German identity would be more eager to prevent American involvement in a war against Germany.

More formally-assimilated German Americans were however more likely to support America

that a large share of Russian and Polish immigrants to the US in this period were Jewish.

First. Among those born outside the United States, filing first papers for naturalization or being a naturalized citizen was associated with an increased propensity to donate. Those with weaker residential ties to the United States—those outside the country in 1935, or who did not own their homes—were also less likely to donate. It is likely however that those with weaker ties to the United States were less able or willing to participate in US politics (Ramakrishnan and Espenshade, 2001).

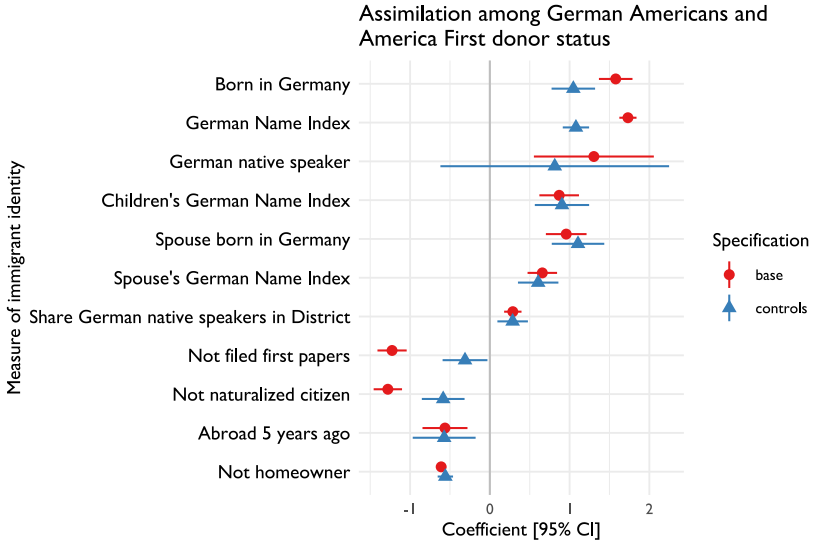


Figure 4: Among German-Americans, America First donors were less culturally assimilated, but more formally assimilated

This figure shows coefficients and 95% confidence intervals from regressions of America First donation against different measures of German immigrant identity. All independent variables are coded to be negatively correlated with assimilation. The sample is restricted to individuals with German Last Name Index values greater than 0.7 (relatively common surnames around this cutoff are Fried, Reinhart, and Weller). The dependent variable is scaled by the rate of donation in this population. Base specification has no controls, controls specification adds fixed effects for age bracket-wage bracket-sex-race-education level-county combinations. Standard errors are robust except for the models for which the independent variable is the share speaking German as a mother tongue in the enumeration district of residence, for which standard errors are clustered at the enumeration district level. First papers and naturalization models are restricted to those born outside the US.

5.3 *First World War Casualties and Isolationism Among German-Americans*

We next examine the relationship between exposure to First World War casualties and donation among German-Americans, in order to pinpoint the importance of German identity. Fouka (2019) illustrates how heightened discrimination during the First World War caused

German-Americans to exert more effort to assimilate, including through giving children less ethnically-distinctive names. Ferrara and Fishback (2022) show that First World War casualties at the local level increased the salience of the war and discrimination against Germans. In the context of our analysis, differential exposure to discrimination in the First World War provides a shock to German assimilation that allows us to more plausibly trace a causal path from the strength of German identity to isolationist activity. Conditional on the level of enlistment in a given county, casualties incurred by those recruits were likely determined by features of the battlefield exogenous to the strength of German identity among German residents of the county. A number of studies demonstrate the as-if random nature of different types of First World War casualties conditional on enlistment (Ferrara and Fishback, 2022; Boehnke and Gay, 2020; Acemoglu et al., 2022; Juan et al., 2023).

Examining the effects of First World War casualties on isolationism also helps us distinguish between mechanisms. The historical literature emphasizes that a desire to avoid the bloodshed of America's First World War involvement animated the isolationist movement. A wish to avoid a wartime uptick in discrimination, as distinct from affinity for Germany or German culture, may have also motivated German-Americans to support isolationism. If isolationists were motivated by the memory of First World War casualties, we would expect those resident in areas which experienced high casualty rates, who likely were more aware of the extent of wartime deaths and lost more friends and family, to be most isolationist. If German-Americans were motivated to oppose American entry into the Second World War by memories of discrimination in the First, we would expect those most exposed to discrimination—prompted by casualties in the local area—to participate the most.

Table 4 shows the results of regressions of America First donation and measures of German identity against log First World War casualties, controlling for log enlistment in addition to the standard county-level controls. Because the independent variable varies at the county level, we cluster standard errors by county. We use observations from the 1910 census linked to the 1940 census, which we have merged into the America First donor database, in order to

measure exposure to casualties based on residence before the war. Model (1) shows that first- and second-generation German immigrants in counties with higher death rates were less likely to donate to America First. This result runs counter to a theory in which Germans mobilized against entry into the Second World War to avoid wartime discrimination. (2) documents a precise null effect of First World War casualties on donation among non-Germans, providing evidence against theories in which casualties affected isolationism through channels unrelated to German identity, such as by increasing perceptions of the cost of intervention. In (3), the dependent variable is the individual's German Name Index. The coefficient close to zero indicates that the parents of German residents of counties exposed to casualties were no more assimilated than the overall German-American population, suggesting that pre-First World War differences do not account for the result in (1). Models (4)–(6) demonstrate that German-American residents of counties exposed to First World War casualties gave their children less distinctively-German names, were less likely to marry someone born in Germany, and by 1940 tended to live in districts with a lower share of native German speakers. All three outcomes are demonstrable forms of cultural assimilation. In concert with (1), they suggest that the strength of German identity had a causal effect on support for isolationism.

One plausible concern with this analysis is that wartime discrimination could cause German-Americans with stronger German identities to emigrate to Germany, removing those with stronger German identities from the sample in places with higher casualty rates. In Table A-4 we find evidence against this concern. German-Americans in counties with more casualties were no more likely to be successfully matched to the 1900 census, but were more likely to be matched to post-First World War censuses, suggesting that they were less likely to emigrate, which is consistent with wartime casualties reducing German identity.[5] The null result for linkage to 1900 suggests again that prior to the First World War there were no clear differences in German identity. We also do not find consistent evidence of German-Americans

[5]Note that if those in counties affected by casualties were easier to link, perhaps because of features of their names, that would likely increase the propensity of them being linked to the America First database and bias against finding a negative effect of casualties on later donation.

	Donor (scaled)		GNI	Child GNI	Spouse German	Dist. % German
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
ln WWI deaths	−0.338**	0.010	0.013	−0.749**	−0.435**	−1.885**
	(0.123)	(0.076)	(0.172)	(0.320)	(0.198)	(0.782)
ln WWI enlistments	0.032	0.337**	0.373	−0.119	0.238**	−0.516
	(0.270)	(0.120)	(0.282)	(0.305)	(0.115)	(1.203)
Germans only	x		x	x	x	x
Non-Germans only		x				
Unmarried in 1910					x	
N	1153062	80791	571123	141 702802	329148	990409
R^2	0.000	0.000	0.006	0.026	0.005	0.141

This table shows individual-level regressions of America First donating and German identity against log First World War casualties in the county of of residence in 1910. The sample consists of individuals linked from the 1910 to the 1940 census. In (1) and (2), the dependent variable is an indicator for donating to America First, scaled by the average in the linked population, in (3) the individual's German Name Index, in (4) the average German Name Index of their children, in (5) an indicator that their spouse was born in Germany, and in (6) the percentage of native German speakers in their Enumeration District of residence in 1940. German Name Index scores are scaled 0–100. (1) and (3)–(6) are restricted to first or second generation German immigrants, (2) excludes German immigrnts, (5) is further restricted to those unmarried in 1910. In addition to the log number of First World War recruits accepted in the county, all models control for log distance to Cook County IL, the urban population share, foreign-born white population share and log population, all measured in 1910 for the county of residence in 1910, and 1910 state fixed effects. Standard errors clustered by 1910 county in parentheses. $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{*}p < 0.1$

Table 4: Relationship between First World War casualties in 1910 county of residence, German identity, and America First activity

exposed to wartime casualties experiencing differences in socioeconomic status that might have influenced their political participation. Table A-5 reports that German-Americans exposed to wartime casualties were slightly more likely to be naturalized citizens and homeowners in 1940, though less likely to have graduated college, and did not differ in terms of filing first papers for naturalization or in log wages. These results increase our confidence that the effect of wartime casualties on donation runs through German identity and not through socioeconomic status.

5.4 *Alternative Theories of Isolationism*

We now move to examine a number of alternative hypotheses: that isolationism was supported by import-competing industries and sectors, and that rural residents and veterans were more likely to be isolationists. We find little evidence to support these theories. To ensure that

this set of null and negative findings are not artifacts of studying donations, we examine a wide range of specifications. The left panel of Figure 5 shows the results of individual-level regressions of donation on indicators for employment in a net-exporting industry, in manufacturing, in finance, and in agriculture, as well as residence on a farm or in a rural area, and veteran status. The raw correlations run against the predictions of a sectoral model: instead of being more isolationist, those employed in import-competing industries were less likely to donate. Those in agriculture or manufacturing were also less likely to donate, suggesting that broad sectoral divisions did not drive alignment over intervention. All these coefficients shrink to zero adding the full set of controls. To guard against the twin concerns that the raw correlation is simply driven by differences in wealth and status that influence donation, while the full set of controls are extremely restrictive, we estimate a third set of models that compare individuals with similar economic and social characteristics to others throughout the country. Doing so gives point estimates that allow us to reject the idea that those in import-competing sectors were more isolationist. One notable result is that those employed in finance were 1.5 times more likely to donate, even in specifications controlling flexibly for income and education.

County-level correlations between the averages of these variables and donation and chapter presence also do not support the sectoral argument (Figure 5, right panel). Counties with import-competing industries were less likely to have an America First chapter, and counties with more employment in manufacturing had lower donation rates. Note that these patterns are not consistent across dependent variables.

To fully explore the relationship between manufacturing interests and isolationism, we estimate the relationship between employment in each manufacturing industry at the individual and county levels and isolationism (Figures A-1 and A-2). Few industries were associated with America First activity, even fewer of these associations are consistent across individual and county specifications, and those industries that were associated with isolationism—such as printing—do not fit closely with theories of sectoral cleavages. Those employed in aircraft

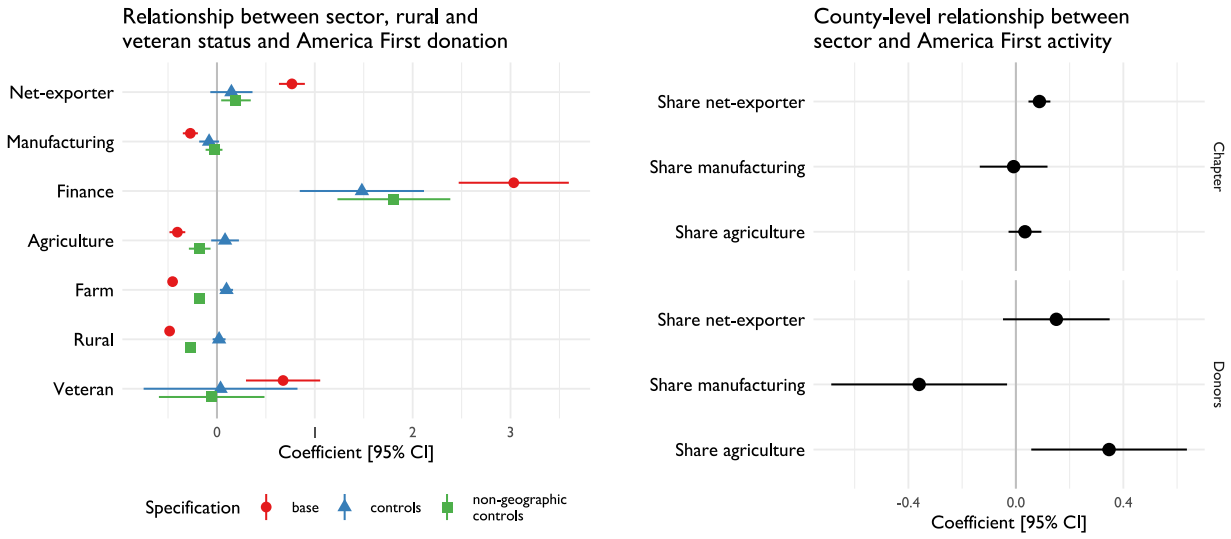


Figure 5: Little evidence for sectoral, rural and veteran theories of isolationism

The left panel shows point estimates and 95% confidence intervals from regressions of scaled donor status against different economic and social variables. Base specification has no controls, controls adds fixed effects for age bracket-wage bracket-sex-race-education level-county combinations, non-geographic controls includes fixed effects for age bracket-wage bracket-sex-race-education level combinations. The right panel shows the results from county-level regressions of an indicator for chapter presence and average scaled donor rate, controlling for log distance to Cook County, the foreign-born and urban population shares, and the log of county population. Confidence intervals are calculated from robust standard errors.

manufacturing, an industry expected to benefit from wartime demand, were more likely to donate in some specifications. Table A-3 documents a precise null relationship between Second World War spending and isolationism, suggesting that areas that stood to gain economically from intervention were not less likely to support isolationism.

There is little evidence to support theories that isolationism was particular to veterans or rural areas. Rural residents were less likely to donate, an association that holds adding controls for non-geographical factors. Veterans were more likely to donate, but that association is not robust to the addition of controls.

It is clear from the spatial distribution of donors (Figure 6, left panel) that support for America First was clustered in the Midwest. This spatial pattern is exactly what one would expect if the movement primarily appealed to German-Americans. The spatial pattern of German-born residents closely matches that of America First donors (Figure 6, right panel). Within Midwestern areas with large German populations, America First was popular in both industrial and rural areas.

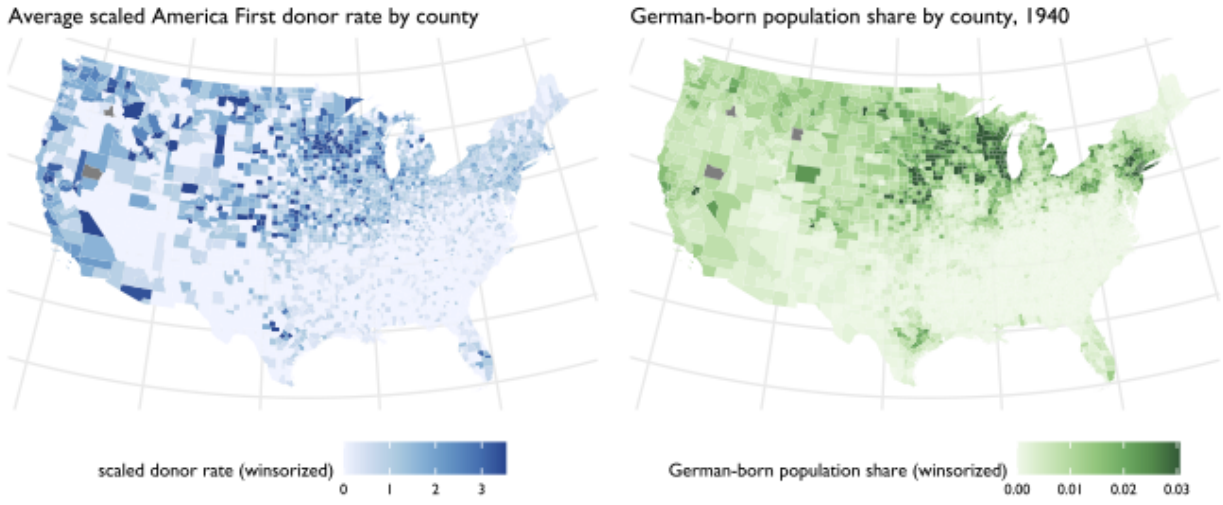


Figure 6: Spatial distribution of donors to America First and German-born population

Much of the historical literature observes that isolationists tended to be Republicans. Note that even if there was no connection between America First and the conservative

movement, we would expect committed isolationists to vote Republican, especially after the First World War, as the party was the more isolationist of the two. In Figure A-4 we examine the relationship between county-level Republican voting and America First activity. We document a positive relationship between Republican voteshare from 1916 onwards and America First donors, but no relationship between pre-1916 Republican voting and America First donors, or between Republican Party support and America First chapters. These results constitute evidence against an effect of political conservatism on support for America First: America First activity is only correlated with voting when isolationism was a major issue dividing the parties.

6 CONCLUSION

Over the 1930s and 1940s, isolationism in the mass public figured heavily in US leaders' calculations of whether to involve the country in efforts to contain Fascism. This paper digitizes archival records on 24,000 donors to the America First Committee, the largest isolationist group, to systematically analyze the basis of this consequential movement.

German-Americans were more likely than the overall population to donate. Among German-Americans, those with stronger German identities donated at higher rates. A negative shock to German identity caused by the distribution of First World War casualties across counties decreased rates of donation among German-Americans but had no effect among non-Germans. This study provides evidence that German identity in particular motivated isolationist activity.

One puzzle raised by our findings concerns why those in export-oriented sectors, and especially finance, were more likely to donate, and why we see little evidence of clear cross-industry patterns. One possible explanation is that within-industry differences in export orientation, and particularly exports towards Axis relative to Allied powers, was more important than between-industry differences. Another explanation, consistent with the high frequency of donation among German immigrants, is that most people were poorly informed

about the war and did not have enough information to form strong policy preferences. Those in industries more exposed to international trade, and those in which information was at a premium, like finance, were likely better-informed and better-placed to judge whether isolationism would benefit them.

Theories of isolationism divide between those that emphasize the links between isolationists and foreign countries, and those that emphasize the lack of such connections. Accounts of isolationism being driven by domestic-focused industries that see little benefit from foreign intervention, or by rural Midwesterners unconcerned about foreign events fall in the second category. Those that emphasize the involvement of ethnic diasporas fall in the former category. This paper provides evidence linking isolationism to international connections.

This linkage has two theoretical implications. First, analyses of diaspora influences on foreign policy often argue that the net effect is to pull foreign policy towards numerous country-specific interventions. Huntington (1997, 49) argued for the need for a national policy of "restraint ... aimed at limiting the diversion of American resources to the service of particularistic subnational, transnational, and nonnational interests." On issues of grand strategy, the net effect of immigrant diasporas, this paper finds, can be to increase restraint. Immigrant diasporas may be more motivated to mobilize to oppose intervention against their home countries, than to support intervention on their behalf. Indeed, we find stronger positive effects of German status on America First support than negative effects of British, Polish, or Russian status.

Second, an implication of theories of isolationism based around insularity is that economic interdependence will create a consensus around foreign engagement. The isolationism of the interwar years can be seen as a product of the country's closed economy. Our findings suggest that if anything economic integration may foster isolationism. We find little evidence that economic insularity drives isolationism, but much evidence that immigration—which is intertwined with economic connections—can provide the basis for a mass movement against intervention.

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Online Appendix

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A SUPPLEMENTARY EXHIBITS

	America First donor (scaled)			Chapter present		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Share born in Germany	34.055**			2.792**		
	(4.625)			(0.962)		
Share Lutheran		1.168**			−0.059	
		(0.267)			(0.046)	
German-American Bund present			0.216**			0.427**
			(0.102)			(0.058)
N	3095	3092	3095	3095	3092	3095
R^2	0.339	0.325	0.316	0.353	0.349	0.380

This table shows the results of county level regressions of America First activity against measures of German-American activity. In models (1)–(3) the dependent variable is the share of the population donating to America First, scaled by the population average, in (4)–(6) an indicator for the presence of an America First chapter in the county. In (1) and (4) the independent variable is the share of the population born in Germany, in (2) and (5) the ratio of members of Lutheran churches to members of all religious denominations, in (3) and (6) an indicator for the presence of a chapter of the German-American Bund. All models include state fixed effects and controls for log distance to Cook County, the share of foreign residents, the share of urban residents, and log population. Robust standard errors in parentheses. $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{*}p < 0.1$

Table A-1: County-level relationship between German Americans and America First activity

	America First donor (scaled)				Chapter
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Veteran household	0.676**	−0.054	0.037		
	(0.194)	(0.275)	(0.401)		
ln WWI deaths				−0.029	0.003
				(0.035)	(0.007)
ln WWI enlistments				−0.017	0.005
				(0.044)	(0.010)
Unit	Individual	Individual	Individual	County	County
Demographic FE		x			
Demographic x county FE			x		
State FE				x	x
County controls				x	x
N	3276236	2175869	2175869	3005	3005
R^2	0.000	0.013	0.468	0.325	0.347

This table shows the results of individual and county level regressions of America First activity against veteran status and First World War casualties. In models (1)–(3) the dependent variable is an indicator for donation to America First, scaled by the population average, in (4) the average of that variable in the county, in (5) an indicator for the presence of an America First chapter in the county. In (1)–(3), the independent variable is an indicator for the household containing a veteran, in (4) and (5) log WWI casualties and log WWI enlistments. Model (2) includes fixed effects for bracket-wage bracket-sex-race-education level combinations, (3) interacts these fixed effects with county fixed effects, (4) and (5) include state fixed effects and controls for log distance to Cook County, the share of foreign residents, the share of urban residents, and log population. Robust standard errors in parentheses. $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{*}p < 0.1$

Table A-2: Null relationship between veteran status and First World war casualties, and America First activity

	Donor (scaled)		Chapter present	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
ln war contracts	0.004		−0.000	
	(0.005)		(0.001)	
ln war manufacturing facilities		0.001		0.000
		(0.004)		(0.001)
N	3095	3095	3095	3095
R^2	0.315	0.315	0.350	0.350

This table shows the results of county level regressions of America First activity against measures of Second World War spending. In models (1)–23) the dependent variable is the share of the population donating to America First, scaled by the population average, in (3)–(4) an indicator for the presence of an America First chapter in the county. In (1) and (3) the independent variable is log (1+) value of war production contracts, in (2) and (4) the log (1+) value of wartime manufacturing facilities. All models include state fixed effects and controls for log distance to Cook County, the share of foreign residents, the share of urban residents, and log population. Robust standard errors in parentheses. $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{*}p < 0.1$

Table A-3: County-level null relationship between Second World War spending and America First activity

	Linked to 1900	1920	1930	1940
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
ln WWI deaths	0.003	0.012**	0.009**	0.007**
	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.001)
ln WWI enlistments	−0.012**	0.000	0.001	0.002
	(0.006)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.002)
N	16401836	16401836	16401836	16401836
R^2	0.017	0.010	0.009	0.009

This table shows individual-level regressions of an indicator that the individual was successfully linked to a different census against First World War casualties in the county of of residence in 1910. The sample consists of individuals born in Germany or with parents born in Germany. In (1) the dependent variable is an indicator that the individual was successfully linked to the 1900 census, in (2), (3), and (4) indicators for linkage to the 1920, 1930, and 1940 censuses. In addition to the log number of First World War recruits accepted in the county, all models control for log distance to Cook County IL, the urban population share, foreign-born white population share and log population, all measured in 1910 for the county of residence in 1910, and 1910 state fixed effects. Standard errors clustered by 1910 county in parentheses. $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{*}p < 0.1$

Table A-4: Relationship between First World War casualties in 1910 county of residence and probability of linkage to other censuses, for German-Americans

	First papers	Naturalized	Graduate	Homeowner	log wage
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
ln WWI deaths	0.002	0.003*	−0.004**	0.031**	−0.008
	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.010)	(0.046)
ln WWI enlistments	−0.004*	−0.003	0.000	−0.003	0.082
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.001)	(0.009)	(0.056)
N	183404	183404	1122518	1147658	1033765
R^2	0.005	0.006	0.005	0.027	0.052

This table shows individual-level regressions of citizenship and economic outcomes in 1940 against log First World War casualties in the county of of residence in 1910. The sample consists of individuals born in Germany or with a parent born in Germany linked from the 1910 to the 1940 census. In (1) the dependent variable is an indicator that the individual had submitted first papers for naturalization, in (2) that they had been naturalized, in (3) an indicator that the individual graduated college, in (4) an indicator for home ownership, in (5) log wage. In addition to the log number of First World War recruits accepted in the county, all models control for log distance to Cook County IL, the urban population share, foreign-born white population share and log population, all measured in 1910 for the county of residence in 1910, and 1910 state fixed effects. Standard errors clustered by 1910 county in parentheses. $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{*}p < 0.1$

Table A-5: Relationship between First World War casualties in 1910 county of residence, and other outcomes for German Americans

	Donor (scaled)					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
N sons	0.094**	0.065**				
	(0.020)	(0.026)				
of military age			0.198**	0.191**	0.191**	0.216**
			(0.033)	(0.041)	(0.033)	(0.048)
not of military age					−0.025	−0.051
					(0.024)	(0.034)
N children FE	x	x				
N military-age FE			x	x	x	x
x N other age FE					x	x
x control FE		x		x		x
N	44743786	39948598	44743786	39948598	44743786	39948598
R^2	0.000	0.232	0.000	0.214	0.000	0.298

This table shows the results of individual level regressions of America First donation against measures of having sons, restricted to individuals with children living in the same residence. In models (1)–(2) the independent variable is the number of sons, in (4)–(6), the number of sons aged 13–35 in 1940, who could have been drafted over the course of the Second World War. (5) and (6) add the number of sons not in that age group. (1) includes fixed effects for the number of children, (2) interacts those with fixed effects for age bracket-wage bracket-sex-race-education level-county combinations, (3) includes fixed effects for the number of children in the military age group, (4) interacts those with the full set of controls, (5) includes fixed effects for combinations of numbers of children of and not of military age, (6) interacts those with the full set of controls. Standard errors clustered by household in parentheses. $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{*}p < 0.1$

Table A-6: Effect of military-age sons on donation to America First

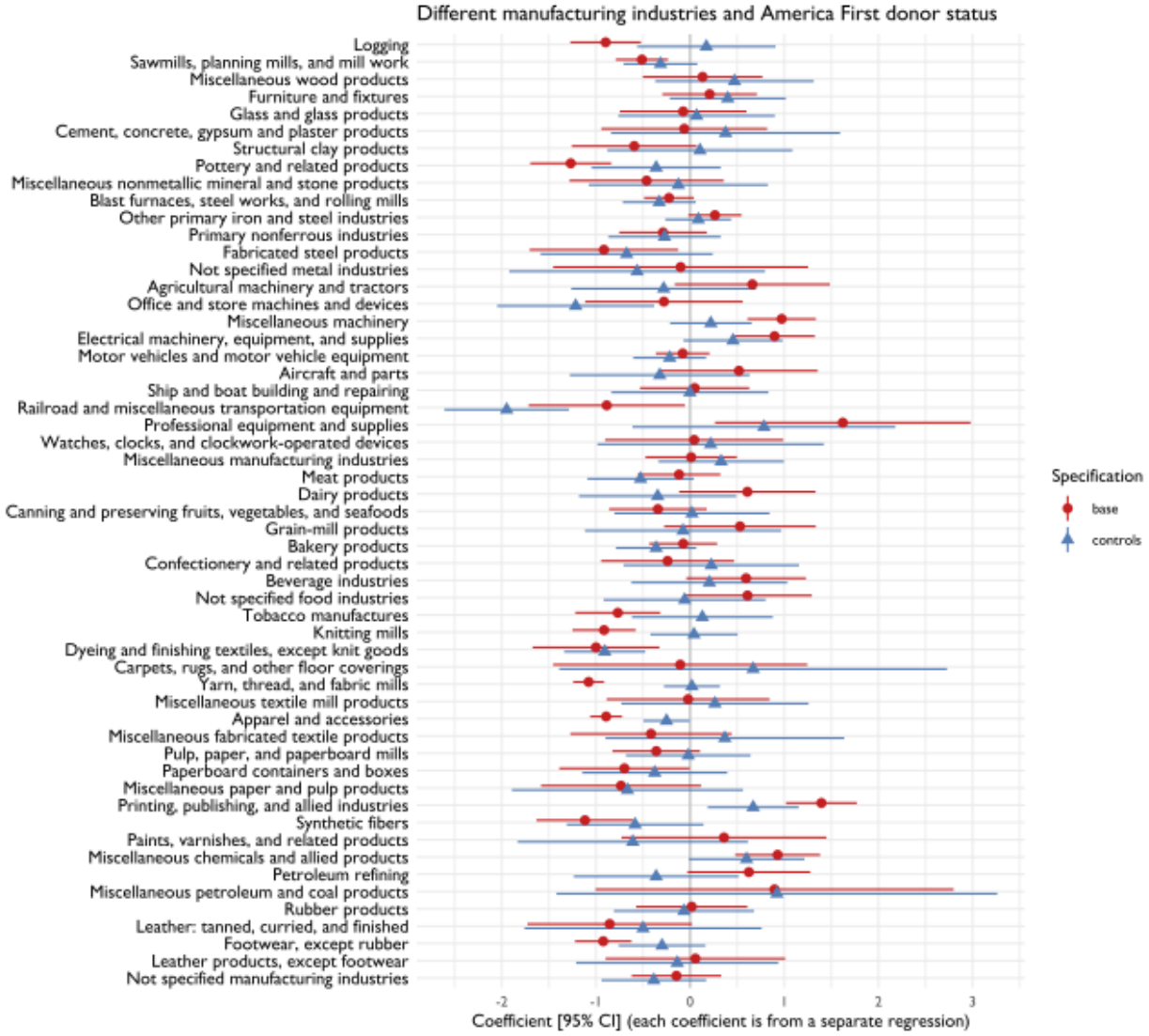

Figure A-1: Relationship between employment in different manufacturing industries and individual-level donation

This figure shows coefficients and 95% confidence intervals from separate regressions of America First donation against employment in different manufacturing industries. The sample is restricted to individuals employed in manufacturing. The dependent variable is scaled by the rate of donation in this population. Base specification has no controls, controls specification adds fixed effects for age bracket-wage bracket-sex-race-education level-county combinations. Standard errors are robust.

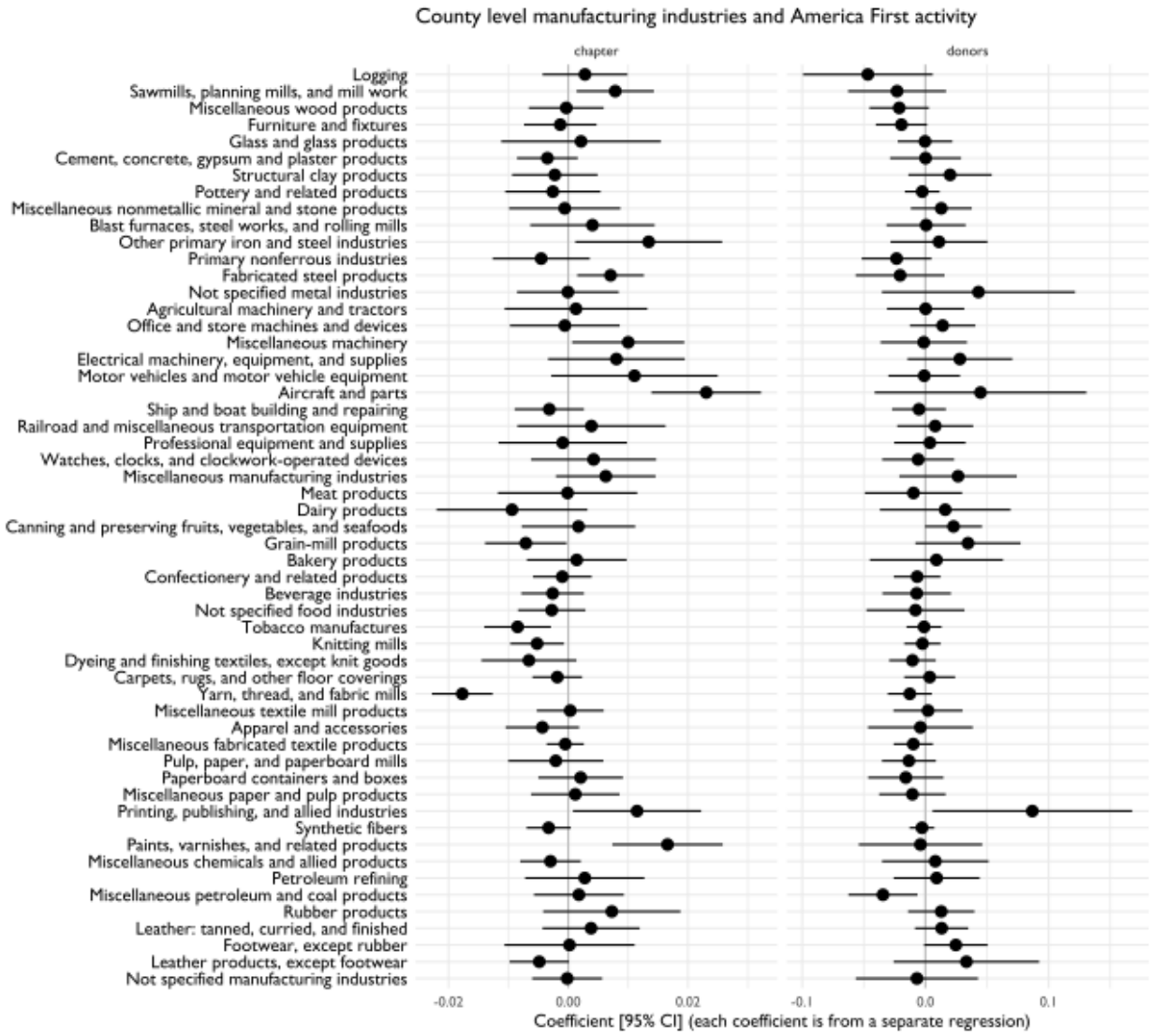

Figure A-2: Relationship between employment in different manufacturing industries at the county level and America First activity

This figure shows coefficients and 95% confidence intervals from separate regressions of county-level America First donation and chapter presence against the share of employment in different manufacturing industries. In the left panel, the dependent variable is an indicator for the presence of an America First chapter, in the right, the average scaled rate of donation. All models include controls for log distance to Cook County, log population, and the shares of urban and foreign-born residents. Standard errors are robust.

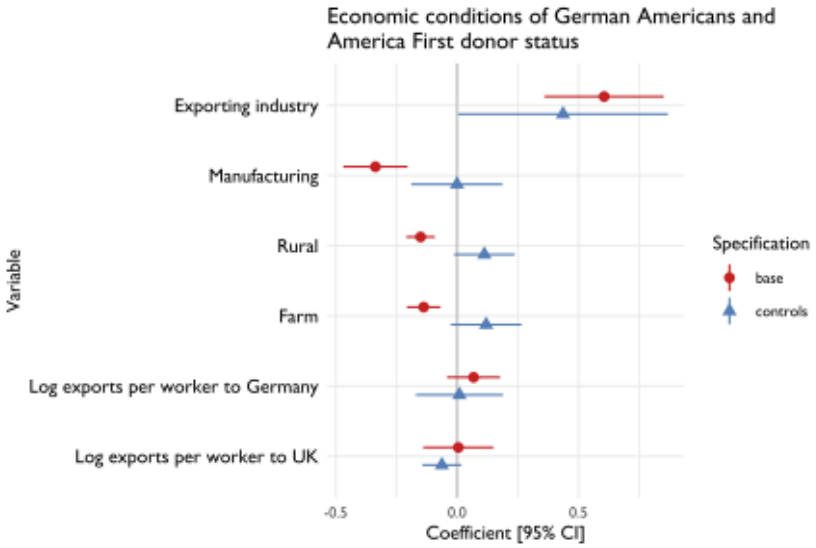

Figure A-3: Economic factors associated with donor status in full population were also associated with donor status among German Americans

This figure shows coefficients and 95% confidence intervals from regressions of America First donation against different measures of economic activity. The sample is restricted to individuals with German Last Name Index values greater than 0.7 (relatively common surnames around this cutoff are Fried, Reinhart, and Weller). The dependent variable is scaled by the rate of donation in this population. Base specification has no controls, controls specification adds fixed effects for age bracket-wage bracket-sex-race-education level-county combinations. Standard errors are robust except for log exports per worker, which are clustered at the industry level. Variables are as described in the text; log exports per worker to Germany and UK are calculated using exports in *Foreign Commerce and Navigation of the United States, 1938*.

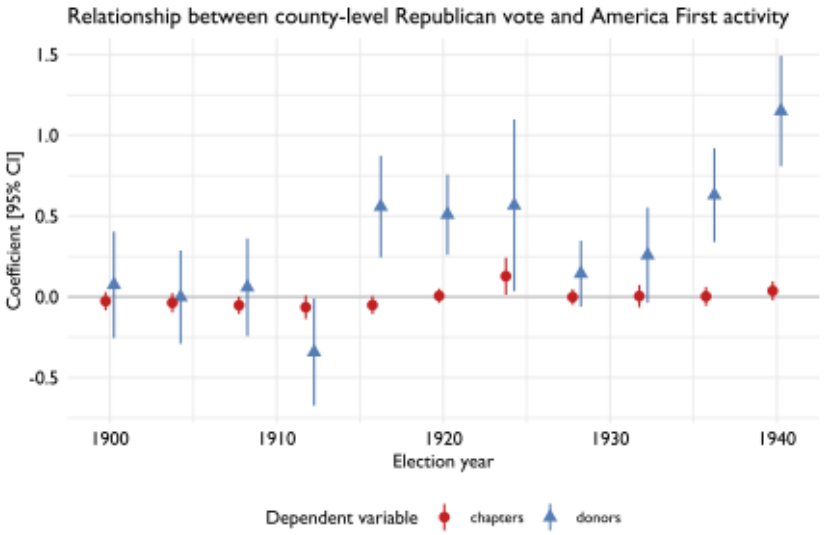

Figure A-4: Relationship between voting Republican and America First activity

This figure shows the point estimates and 95% confidence intervals for county-level Republican share of the two-party vote in a given year, from regressions in which the dependent variable is an indicator for America First chapter presence or scaled donors per capita. Each point is from a separate regression. All models control for log distance to Cook County, the foreign and urban population shares, the log population, and state fixed effects. Confidence intervals are calculated using robust standard errors.

Table B-7: Variables merged on, in sequence

	Exact Merge	Fuzzy (Jaro-Winckler) Merge
1	Last name, first name, state	
2	Last name, first word of first name, state	
3	Last name, first name initials (if full first name is not provided in donors dataset), state	
4	Last name, first name, state, county	
5	Last name, first word of first name, county	
6	Last name, initials, county	
7	Last name, first name, county, street	
8	Last name, initials, county, street	
9	Last name, first name, town	
10	Last name, first word of first name, town	
11	Last name, initials, town	
12	Last name, first name, county	street
13	Initials, state	Last name
14	Initials, county	Last name
15	State	Last name, first name
16	County	Last name, first name
17	First name, town	Last name
18	Town	Last name, first name
19	Last name, first name	
20	Last name, first word of first name	
21	Last name, initials	

B FURTHER DETAILS ON DIGITIZED DATA AND MERGING TO CENSUS

As noted in subsection 4.1, we examine a subset of the documents in the Hoover Institution archive. In particular, we identified 469 sheets of donors records and 184 sheets aggregating responses. We processed most of the sheets of donor records using optical character recognition (OCR) engines ABBYY Finereader PDR (202 sheets) and Amazon Textract (222 sheets), manually inspecting digitization output for each sheet. For sheets with poor digitization results due to image quality (the remainder of sheets), we transcribe donor records by hand. All chapter-level data was transcribed by hand.

	Merged					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
German Name Index	−0.005					
	(0.013)					
German Last Name Index		−0.020**	−0.009			
		(0.010)	(0.010)			
ln donors with same last name			0.034**			
			(0.003)			
ln population of NHGIS place				−0.007**		
				(0.001)		
ln value of contributions					0.012**	
					(0.003)	
ln number of contributions						0.044**
						(0.006)
Intercept	0.687**	0.713**	0.665**	0.699**	0.607**	0.601**
	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.014)	(0.004)	(0.004)
N	15310	18263	18263	20986	23377	23711
R^2	0.000	0.000	0.009	0.002	0.001	0.002

This table shows the results of individual-level in which the sample is all donors in our dataset and the dependent variable is an indicator for whether the individual was successfully merged into the 1940 US Census. Robust standard errors in parentheses. $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{*}p < 0.1$

Table B-8: Correlates of merge success