WHO WERE THE ISOLATIONISTS?

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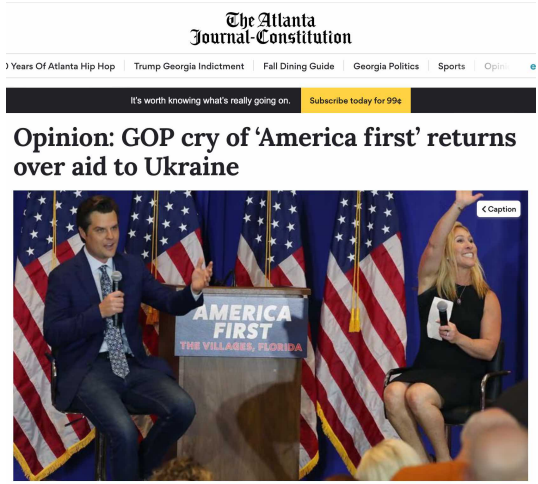
Motivation: Resurgence of Isolationism

- Growing isolationism among far right
- References interwar rhetoric
- Important: “American isolationism became the handmaiden of European appeasement” (Divine 1965)
- Need to better understand isolationism then and now



But Who Were the Isolationists?

Theories:

1. Domestic-focused business interests — no benefit to global involvement
   (Trubowitz 1998, Narizny, 2007, Frieden 1988)
2. Immigrants from Axis powers — opposed to intervention against origin country
   (Berinsky 2009)

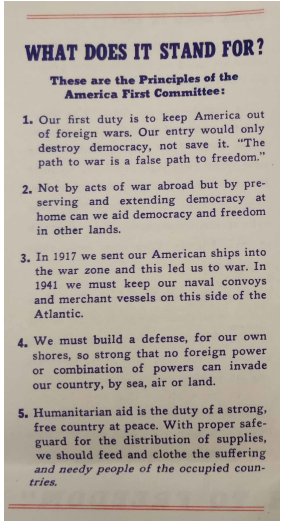
Theoretical stakes: Can redistributive policy decrease isolationism?

This Paper

- **Data:** Archival records of 23,660 donors to the America First Committee
- **Processing:** Individual records merged to 1940 US Census microdata
- **Finding:** German immigrants were more likely to donate
- **Explanation:** Strength of German identity

The America First Committee

- Largest and most mainstream isolationist group
- Single issue group opposed to US intervention
- Founded September 1940 by students at Yale Law School
- 800,000 members in 452 chapters
- Disbanded after Pearl Harbor
- Papers acquired by Hoover Institution Archive



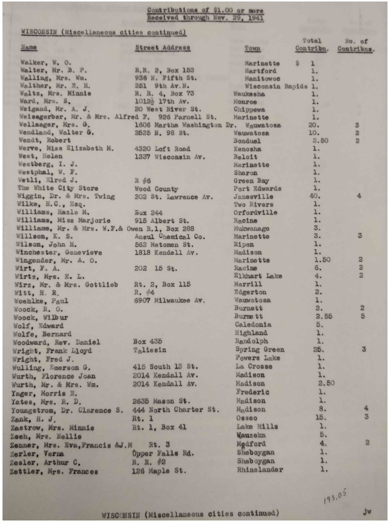
WHAT DOES IT STAND FOR?

These are the Principles of the America First Committee:

1. Our first duty is to keep America out of foreign wars. Our entry would only destroy democracy, not save it. "The path to war is a false path to freedom."
2. Not by acts of war abroad but by preserving and extending democracy at home can we aid democracy and freedom in other lands.
3. In 1917 we sent our American ships into the war zone and this led us to war. In 1941 we must keep our naval convoys and merchant vessels on this side of the Atlantic.
4. We must build a defense, for our own shores, so strong that no foreign power or combination of powers can invade our country, by sea, air or land.
5. Humanitarian aid is the duty of a strong, free country at peace. With proper safeguard for the distribution of supplies, we should feed and clothe the suffering *and needy people of the occupied countries.*

The Data

- Records of 23,660 donors
- Close to universe, Cole (1953) specifies 25,000
- Name, Street, Town, Amount, Number of Donations
- Scan and OCR archival records
- Merge to 1940 US census microdata
  Details
- 61% merge rate



Contributions of $1.00 or more
Received through Nov. 29, 1941

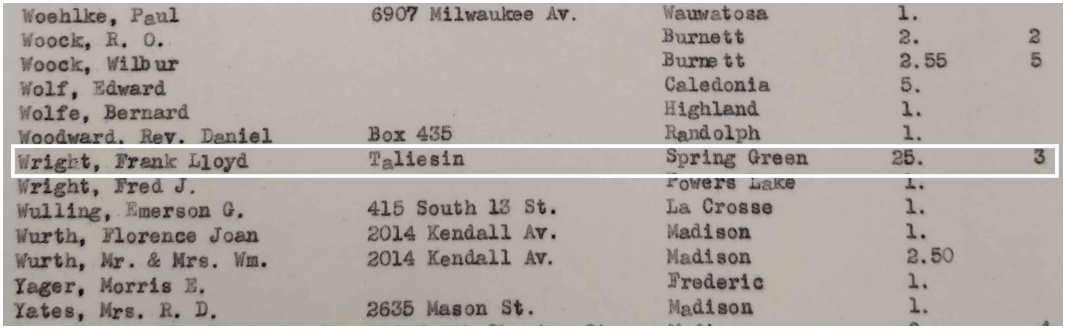
WISCONSIN (Miscellaneous cities continued)

Name	Street Address	Town	Total Contribn.	No. of Contribns.
Walker, W. O.		Marinette	$ 1	
Walter, Mr. B. P.	R.R. 2, Box 152	Hartford	1.	
Walling, Mrs. Wm.	936 N. Fifth St.	Manitowoc	1.	
Walther, Mr. E. H.	251 9th Av.N.	Wisconsin Rapids	1.	
Waltz, Mrs. Minnie	R. R. 4, Box 73	Waukesha	1.	
Ward, Mrs. S.	1012½ 17th Av.	Monroe	1.	
Weigand, Mr. A. J.	20 West River St.	Chippewa	1.	
Weissgerber, Mr. & Mrs. Alfred F.	926 Parnell St.	Marinette	1.	
Wellaeger, Mrs. G.	1606 Martha Washington Dr.	Wauwatosa	20.	3
Wendland, Walter G.	2525 N. 98 St.	Wauwatosa	10.	2
Wendt, Robert		Bonduel	2.50	2
Werve, Miss Elizabeth M.	4320 Loft Road	Kenosha	1.	
West, Helen	1337 Wisconsin Av.	Beloit	1.	
Westberg, I. J.		Marinette	1.	
Westphal, W. F.		Sharon	1.	
Wetli, Elred J.	R #6	Green Bay	1.	
The White City Store	Wood County	Port Edwards	1.	
Wiggin, Dr. & Mrs. Twing	202 St. Lawrence Av.	Janesville	40.	4
Wilke, H.C., Esq.		Two Rivers	1.	
Williams, Hazle M.	Box 244	Orfordville	1.	
Williams, Miss Marjorie	915 Albert St.	Racine	1.	
Williams, Mr. & Mrs. W.F.& Owen	R.1, Box 288	Mukwanago	3.	
Willson, K. S.	Ansul Chemical Co.	Marinette	3.	3
Wilson, John H.	562 Metomen St.	Ripon	1.	
Winchester, Genevieve	1818 Kendell Av.	Madison	1.	
Wingender, Mr. A. O.		Marinette	1.50	2
Wirt, F. A.	202 15 St.	Racine	6.	2
Wirtz, Mrs. E. L.		Elkhart Lake	4.	2
Wirz, Mr. & Mrs. Gottlieb	Rt. 2, Box 115	Merrill	1.	
Witt, H. R.	R. #4	Edgerton	2.	
Woehlke, Paul	6907 Milwaukee Av.	Wauwatosa	1.	
Woock, R. O.		Burnett	2.	2
Woock, Wilbur		Burnett	2.55	5
Wolf, Edward		Caledonia	5.	
Wolfe, Bernard		Highland	1.	
Woodward, Rev. Daniel	Box 435	Randolph	1.	
Wright, Frank Lloyd	Taliesin	Spring Green	25.	3
Wright, Fred J.		Powers Lake	1.	
Wulling, Emerson G.	415 South 13 St.	La Crosse	1.	
Wurth, Florence Joan	2014 Kendall Av.	Madison	1.	
Wurth, Mr. & Mrs. Wm.	2014 Kendall Av.	Madison	2.50	
Yager, Morris E.		Frederic	1.	
Yates, Mrs. R. D.	2635 Mason St.	Madison	1.	
Youngstrom, Dr. Clarence S.	444 North Charter St.	Madison	8.	4
Zank, H. J.	Rt. 1	Osseo	15.	3
Zastrow, Mrs. Minnie	Rt. 1, Box 41	Lake Mills	1.	
Zeeh, Mrs. Nellie		Wauzeka	5.	
Zenner, Mrs. Eva,Francis &J.M	Rt. 3	Medford	4.	2
Zerler, Verna	Upper Falls Rd.	Sheboygan	1.	
Zesler, Arthur C.	R. R. #2	Sheboygan	1.	
Zettler, Mrs. Frances	126 Maple St.	Rhinelander	1.	

193.05

WISCONSIN (Miscellaneous cities continued)　jw

The Data



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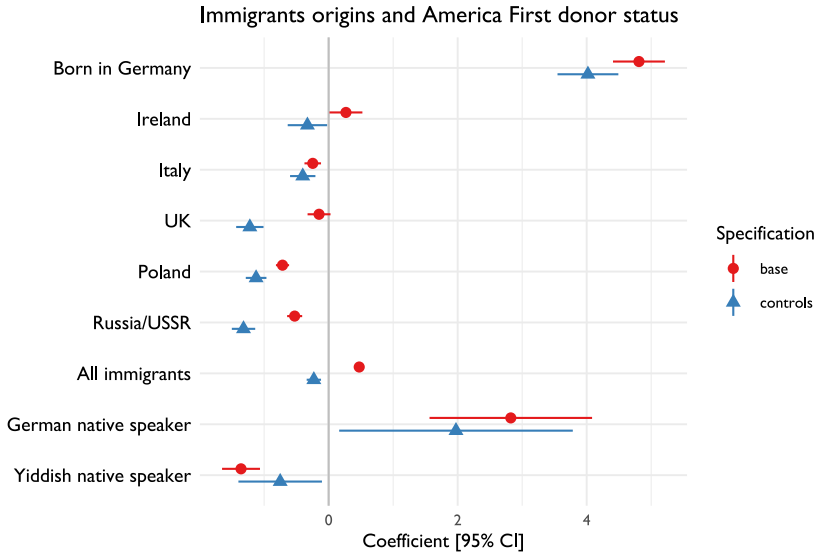
Estimating Equation for Predictors of Isolationism

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

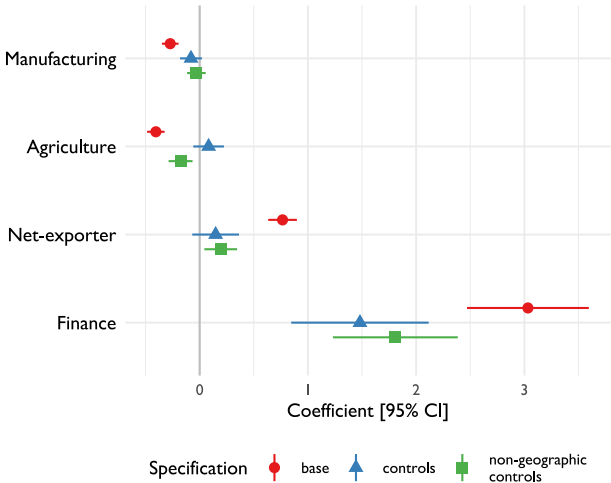
- $Donor_i$: Indicator that i is a donor, scaled by average rate
  - Costly revealed preference measure of isolationism
- X_i: Independent variable of interest
- $\gamma_{b(i)}$: Fixed effect for i's age $\times$ wage $\times$ sex $\times$ race $\times$ education $\times$ county
- Compares rates of donation among individuals with exact same covariates
- Sample: Total US population in 1940

Result 1: German Immigrants Were More Likely to Donate



Result 2: Little Support for Sectoral Theories

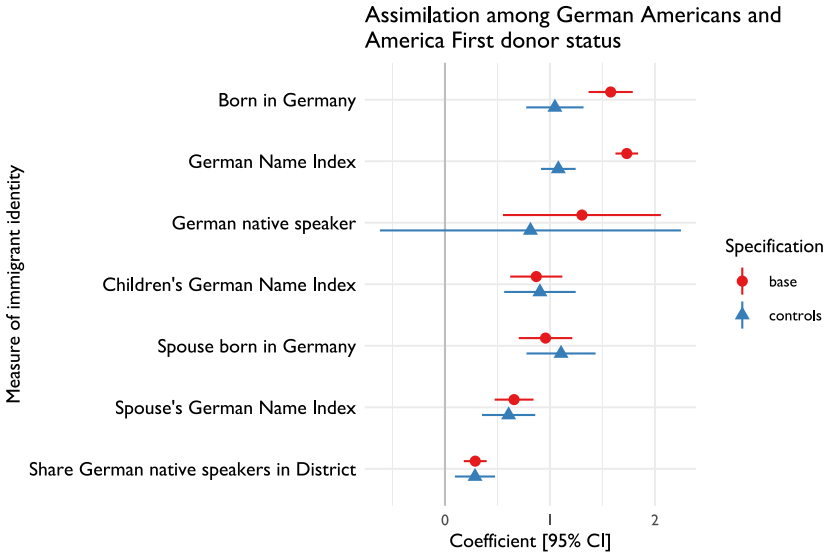
Relationship between sector, rural and veteran status and America First donation



- No clear patterns across manufacturing industries
  Individual-level | County-level
- Null or wrong-signed results at county level
  Evidence
- No clear pattern subset by region
  Evidence: Manufacturing | Agriculture
- Null effect of WW2 spending at county level
  Evidence

Full sectoral results

Result 3: Stronger German Identities Are Associated With Donation



Using First World War Casualties to Study the Causal Mechanism

- First World War casualties stimulated anti-German discrimination (Ferrara and Fishback, 2022)
- Anti-German discrimination led to decreased investment in German identity (Fouka 2019)
- Casualties $\rightarrow$ Decreased German identity $\rightarrow$ Decreased donation
- Alternative-signed prediction: fear of wartime discrimination drove isolationism

Specification

$$Y_i = \beta_1 \ln \textit{Casualties}_{c(i)} + \beta_2 \ln \textit{Enlistments}_{c(i)} + \mathbf{x}'_{c(i)}\gamma + \delta_{s(i)} + \varepsilon_i$$

- Y_i: outcome variable for person i in 1940
- $\ln \textit{Casualties}_{c(i)}$: log casualties in i's 1910 county of residence
- $\ln \textit{Enlistments}_{c(i)}$: control for log enlistments in that county
- $\mathbf{x}_{c(i)}$: Controls for 1910 county log distance to Cook County IL, urban population share, foreign-born white population share and log population
- $\delta_{s(i)}$: State fixed effect for 1910 residence
- Samples: Linked from 1910 to 1940 census, separating German immigrants
- Identification: Conditional on enlistment, casualties should be exogenous
  (Ferrara and Fishback, 2022; Boehnke and Gay, 2020; Acemoglu et al., 2022; Juan et al., 2023)

Result 4: German Immigrants Exposed to Casualties Had Weaker German Identities and Were Less Likely to Donate

	Donor (scaled)		GNI	Child GNI	Spouse German	Dist. % German
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
ln casualties	−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 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	807915	1123141	702802	329148	990409
R^2	0.000	0.000	0.006	0.026	0.005	0.141

Negative effects on emigration | No clear effects on economic status

Who Were the Isolationists?

Contributions

1. New archival data on isolationist donors
2. Evidence for immigrant diaspora theories of isolationism (Berinsky 2009, Shain 1994, Saideman 2001, Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, Prather 2020, Prasad and Savatic 2022)
3. Evidence of identity motivating foreign policy mobilization

Work in progress — what else should we examine?

Appendix

Details of Merge

Variables merged on | Merge example | Correlates of merge success | Descriptives of merged sample

Additional Results for Donation

County-level effects of German status | Full sectoral results | Individual-level industry patterns

County-level industry patterns | County-level sectoral patterns | Regional effects of manufacturing

Regional effects of agriculture | WW2 spending | Partisanship | Map

Additional Results for WWI Casualties

Negative effects on emigration | No clear effects on economic status

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	

Merge Example

Table: Raw donor data

Name	Address	City	State
Sawyer, Mrs. Margaret H.	772 Vincente Ave	Berkeley	CA

Appendix

Merge Example

Table: Processed donor data

firstname	first_word_firstname	surname	street	town	county	state
Margaret H.	Margaret	Sawyer	Vincente Avenue	Berkeley	Alameda	CA

Appendix

Merge Example

Table: Processed donor data

firstname	**first_word_firstname**	**surname**	**street**	**town**	**county**	**state**
Margaret H.	Margaret	Sawyer	Vincente Avenue	Berkeley	Alameda	CA

1. **Exact match on:** Last name, first name, state → no unique match
2. **Exact match on:** Last name, first word of first name, state → no unique match
3. **Exact match on:** Last name, first name, state, county → no unique match
4. **Exact match on:** Last name, first word of first name, state, county → unique match

Appendix

Merge validation

	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

Appendix

Descriptives 1

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

Appendix

Descriptives 2

Variable	Census average (%)	Donor average (%)
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

Appendix

Effects of German Status at the County Level

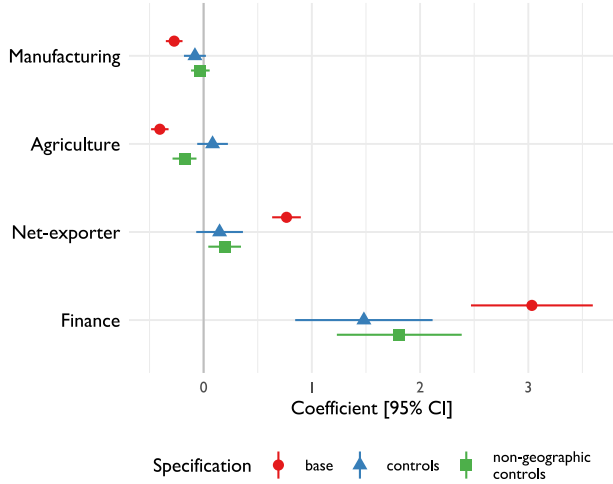
	America First donor (scaled)			Chapter present		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Share born in Germany	34.055**			2.792**		
	(4.625)			(0.962)		
Share Lutheran		1.168**			−0.059	
		(0.267)			(0.046)	
German-American Bund present			0.216**			0.427**
			(0.102)			(0.058)
N	3095	3092	3095	3095	3092	3095
R^2	0.339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

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

Appendix

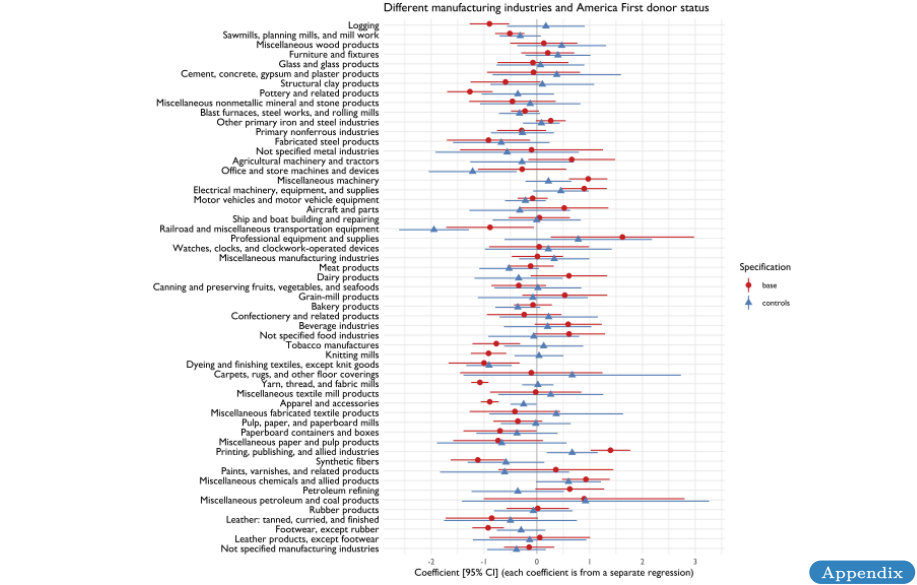
Full Sectoral Results

Relationship between sector, rural and veteran status and America First donation



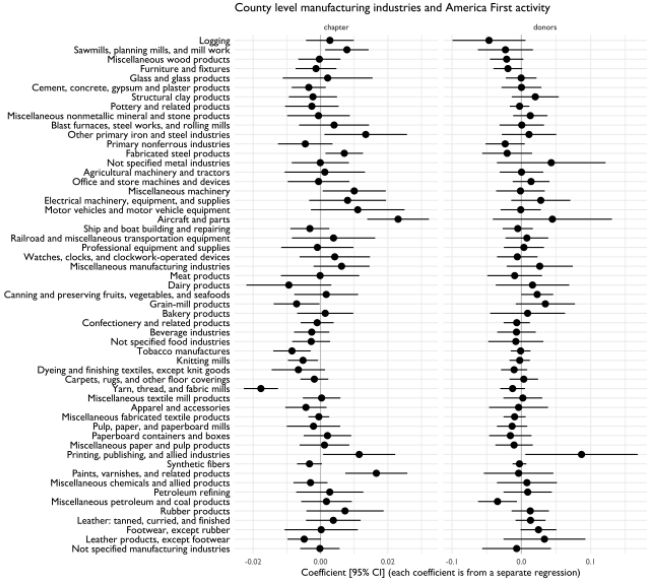
Appendix

No Clear Individual-Level Pattern Across Manufacturing Industries



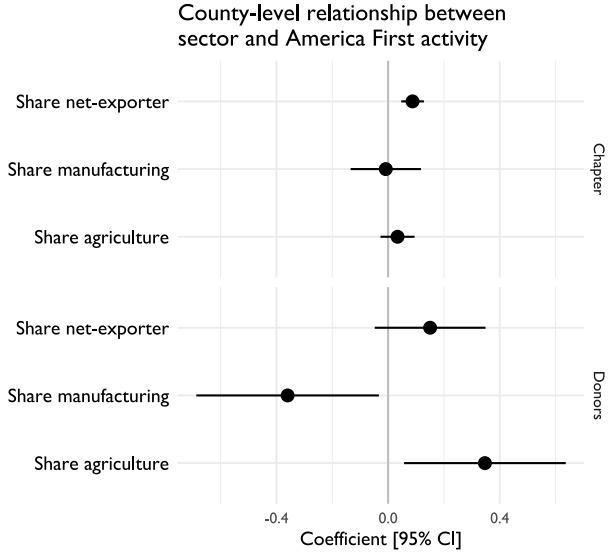
Appendix

No Clear County-Level Pattern Across Manufacturing Industries



Appendix

No Clear County-Level Sectoral Pattern



Appendix

Against Theory, Negative Effects of Manufacturing Stronger in Midwest

	America First donor (scaled)					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Employed in manufacturing	−0.415**	−0.059	−0.735**	−0.205*	−0.022	0.024
	(0.067)	(0.079)	(0.083)	(0.105)	(0.042)	(0.062)
Controls		x		x		x
Northeast	x	x				
Midwest			x	x		
South					x	x
N	14741875	13453076	15789480	14611542	15633839	13886278
R^2	0.000	0.099	0.000	0.163	0.000	0.229

Table: Relationship between manufacturing employment and donating to America First by region

Appendix

No Clear Regional Variation in Effects of Agriculture

	America First donor (scaled)					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Employed in agriculture	−0.316**	0.003	0.122	0.125	−0.182**	0.022
	(0.131)	(0.177)	(0.100)	(0.164)	(0.031)	(0.056)
Controls		x		x		x
Northeast	x	x				
Midwest			x	x		
South					x	x
N	14741875	13453076	15789480	14611542	15633839	13886278
R^2	0.000	0.099	0.000	0.163	0.000	0.229

Table: Relationship between agricultural employment and donating to America First by region

Appendix

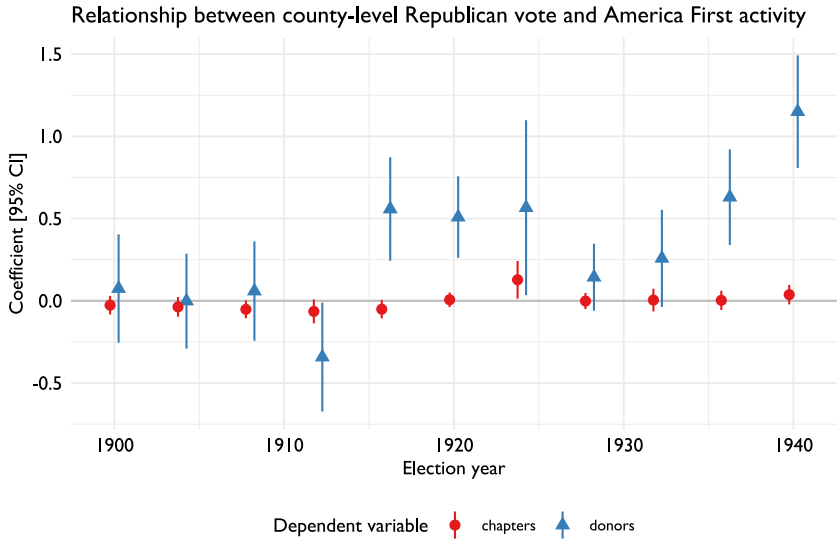
WW2 Contracts Not Associated With Isolationism

	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

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

Appendix

Relationship Between Republican Support and America First Activity



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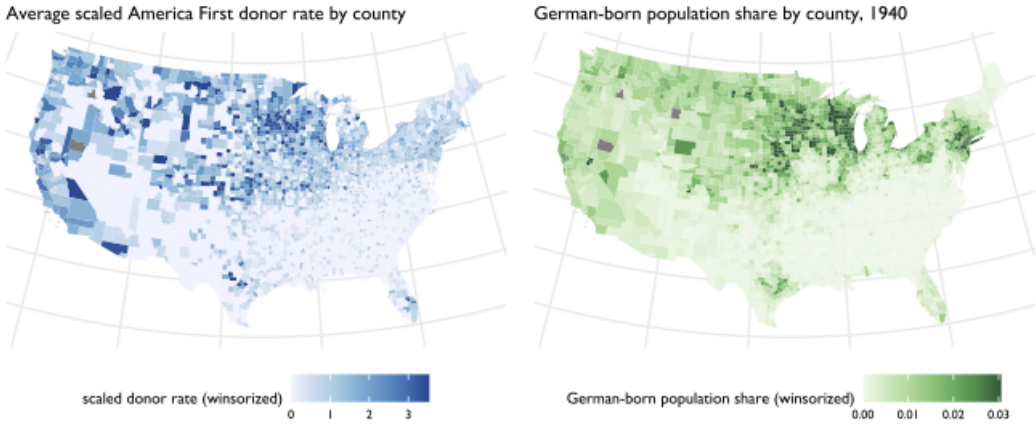

Figure: Spatial distribution of donors to America First and German-born population

Appendix

Exposure to Casualties Associated With Less Emigration

	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

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

Appendix

Exposure to Casualties Not Associated With Economic Outcomes

	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

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

Appendix