A Swing Vote from the Ethnic Backstage:

The German American Role in Donald Trump's 2016 Victory

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Abstract

We question the growing consensus in the literature that European Americans behave as a homogenous pan-ethnic coalition of voters. Seemingly below the radar of scholarship on voting groups in American politics, we identify a group of white voters that behaves differently from others: German Americans, the largest ethnic group, regionally concentrated in the 'Swinging Midwest'. Using voting returns at the county level and leveraging ancestry group information from the US Census and the American Community Survey (ACS) we provide evidence for patterns that are not only related to partisanship but to characteristics which are particularly evident in the case of Donald Trump. German Americans traditionally support candidates with isolationist tendencies who challenge Washington as political outsiders. Other ethnic groups are far less attracted to these traits. Our findings indicate that European American experiences of migration and integration still echo into the political arena of today, and should be taken seriously.

Keywords: Ancestry, presidential election, Trump, American politics, outsider effect, assimilation

1 Introduction

'Will German Americans make Trump President?' During the run-up to the U.S. presidential election of 2016, several German news outlets shifted their attention to a large group of voters rarely recognized in the political behavior literature. Under the headline above, the newspaper *Die Welt* painted a scenario in which voters with German ancestry in several Midwestern states could be turning the tide in favor of the Republican candidate (Gersemann 2016). *Focus Online, a* prominent German online

news resource posted a video explaining why German Americans living along the 'German Belt' between Pennsylvania and Oregon might be deciding the 2016 general election.[1] Both analyses referenced an opinion poll by Morning Consult with more than 5000 Americans who had specified their ancestral affiliations. The poll showed that Americans of different European ancestries supported Trump to different degrees. German Americans favored him by a margin of 18% over Clinton, others also went against Clinton but lagged substantially behind in their support for Trump (Aldhous & Singer-Vine 2016). To date, there has only been a snap-shot inquiry into the phenomenon (Urlaub & Huenlich 2016). At the same time, Trump's victory continues to raise the question whether "whites across the country developed a pan-ethnic racial identity" (Arbour 2018: 34) – especially in light of the pronounced racism exhibited by part of his constituency. In contrast to previous research, we provide evidence that leads us to question the existence of such a homogenous voter coalition. Moreover, we provide the first systematic post-election analysis of the distinctive role an estimated 46 million self-identified German Americans played for Donald Trump's victory in 2016. The study fills a crucial gap not only because German Americans make up the largest ethnic group in the U.S. and are regionally concentrated in the 'Swinging Midwest'. More importantly, what motivated the communities behind this statistic to vote for Trump in 2016, could also be playing a decisive role in the 2020 election and beyond. Through the lens of history, the most systematic factors in German American voting behavior appear to be twofold: the rural, communal conservatism on the one hand and the anti-establishment appeal of political outsiders with an isolationist agenda on the other hand.

After taking a look at the historic presence and the political past of German Americans, we embed our study in the context of research on the remaining influence of white ethnicity in American politics (Sonnenshein & Valentino 2000, Gimpel & Cho 2004, Arbour & Teigen 2011, Arbour 2018). Using aggregated characteristics of seldom tapped data sources such as the US Census and the American Community Surveys (ACS) together with official voting returns at the county level, we follow three lines of inquiry. First, we provide evidence that supporting Trump in the voting booth can be attributed to the specific candidate instead of traditional conservatism in the German American community or a gradual realignment in favor of the Republican Party (Arbour 2018). Second, consistent with previous research that finds German Americans to have a historic record as swing voters in many regions (Kleppner 1970, Jensen 1971, Gimpel & Cho 2004), we show that counties with a large share of German Americans are also more likely to lay in States that voted for Obama 2012 but for Trump in 2016. When turning to counties in those swing states, we show that precisely those counties where German

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[1] https://www.focus.de/politik/videos/wahlen-in-den-usa-warum-die-deutsch-amerikaner-die-us-praesidentenwahl-entscheiden-koennten_id_6177921.html

Americans dominate most were those most likely to switch their majority from Obama to Trump. Finally, while working with limited data on the county level, we probe a causal mechanism for a German American pro-Trump swing. While it is implausible to claim that German Americans supported Trump merely based on his German ancestry (as 'one of their own', so to speak), the communal experience of German Americans has promoted sympathies for political outsiders with isolationist tendencies, i. e. a protectionist and anti-interventionist outlook. The rallying cry "America First" was a cornerstone of Trump's campaign. Though we cannot rerun history to come up with a reasonable counterfactual, we will show that candidates with a similar agenda benefited from the German American vote throughout the 20th century. Even Barack Obama made strong gains compared to other Democrats in German American regions when he stepped into the arena as a potential outsider with an anti-war record. Overall, our findings indicate that European American experiences of migration and integration still echo into the political arena of today, and should be taken seriously.

2 German ethnicity and its role in U.S. Politics

Understanding how the specific German American experience transferred into political views that remain with many communities until today, requires historic dimension. During a substantial increase of immigration from Europe in the 19th century, close to 5 million new residents arrived in the U. S. from the regions that eventually formed the German Empire (Office of Immigration Statistics 2009: 6). At the time, the population from various regions of German-speaking Europe was more heterogeneous than other immigrant groups such as the Irish or Scandinavians. Yet, the world view of German Lutherans, Catholics and Jews was closely connected to their mother tongue. As German settlers played a crucial role during westward expansion, the reach of the German language soon extended across the country. By 1890, when the census collected systematic information on immigrant languages for the first time, German had been established as a language of instruction in numerous public and parochial schools from the East Coast to the Midwest. Bilingual programs and German instruction existed in 25 states, including Southern States such as Texas and Missouri (Buenger & Kamphoefner 2019, Kamphoefner 1994, Toth 1990). 796 of the 1170 foreign language newspapers in the United States in 1894 were in German, 97 of which were daily papers (Park 1922:310, Arndt & Olson 1976). By 1900, there were close to 9 million speakers of German, nearly 12 % of the total population – a proportion barely shy of the number of Spanish speakers in the U.S. today.[2]

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[2] This number is calculated by David Huenlich and Walter Kamphoefner using ancestry.com and the 2008 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics (YIS, Office of Immigration Statistics 2009). Kloss (1966) offers the same estimate for 1910 which would be around 10 % of the population. Census data shows that the total population in 1900 was approximately 76,000,000. There were 6,509,166 permanent residents with two German-born parents, as well as an additional 615,933 residents with only a

German political activism was split into many factions from secular revolutionaries to religious conservatives. At the same time, German Americans collectively occupied a cultural and political outsider role on several occasions. By and large, Germans stood for abolition and fought on the side of the Union during the Civil War. German-dominated counties in the South were known for their Unionist sympathies, and subsequently suffered increased discrimination in the years before, during and after the Civil War (Kamphoefner 1999, 2016). In the Midwest, German Lutherans and Catholics came into conflict with Pietistic interpretations of American Protestantism. Issues of contention were drinking habits and mother tongue schooling. When the Bennet and Edwards Laws in Wisconsin and Illinois in 1889 briefly introduced an English-only policy to the school system, the legislation met with fierce resistance in various parts of the German-speaking community (Salmons 2017, Jensen 1971). Later, German immigrants became the linchpin in a power struggle between Republicans and Democrats. In a move to increase its political leverage, the Democratic Party effectively reshaped its image to appeal to a coalition of Catholics and German Lutherans, thereby scoring multiple victories in the Midwest in the late 19th century (Kleppner 1970, Jensen 1971). In the South, German Texans made deliberate moves to become part of the white establishment, which meant abandoning formerly held positions on racial equality (Buenger & Kamphoefner 2019).

The trade-offs with the English speaking majority were short lasting. The outbreak of World War I undermined the influence of German Americans and their positive image "as one of the most assimilable and reputable of immigrant groups" (Higham 1998, quoted in Fouka 2019: 407). Anti-German hysteria led to censorship of German publishing and an attack on German-English bilingual education. Recent research shows that German American reactions to this wave of hostility were localized and diverse. In states with more reported incidents of anti-German violence, German Americans increased petitions for naturalization and adopted English names for their children and themselves (Fouka 2019). Where legislation outlawed the German language in schools even after WWI, German Americans reacted by sending their children to German-speaking Sunday schools and increasingly marrying within their ethnic group (Fouka 2016). In the South of the 1920s, the Second Ku Klux Klan targeted German communities over the issues of language use and prohibition (Kamphoefner 2008, 2014). While making concessions, German Americans mostly stuck to their ways behind the

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German-born mother. Another 1,402,760 residents with only a German-born father are less likely to have received full exposure to German but language loss among these members of the second generation was certainly not complete due to family ties and the availability of German schooling. The statistical breakdown in the YIS of permanent residents from mainly German-speaking Austria vs. multilingual Hungary leads to a conservative estimate of an additional 500,000 German speakers by the year 1900. An additional 500,000 Austrians attained permanent residency before 1910. Exact tallies of German speakers from Alsace, Bohemia, and other Germanophone regions of Central Europe are not available, but a conservative estimate of 100,000 speakers appears valid. German was also spoken by German descendants in the third generation and many members of the Jewish community. Both are not included in the calculation due to lack of statistical information.

closed doors of their ethnic societies (Kamphoefner 2015: 49f). At the local level it appears that deliberate assimilation and ethnic introversion were strategies that complemented rather than contradicted each other and allowed German Americans to navigate the period between the World Wars. In fact, there are indications that the cultural, linguistic and communal ties in many Midwestern communities endured into the later 20th century (Wilkerson & Salmons 2008, 2012).

Economically, German Americans continued their success story of previous decades (cf. Abramitzky et al. 2014). Kazal (2004) suggests that part of the assimilatory process was a more active identification with American consumerism. Simultaneously, German Americans became politically less and less visible. They remained a politically ambiguous force at the ballot box, however, often favoring political outsiders with an isolationist agenda or a shared love of German drinking habits. If a third-party outsider confronted Washington, had advocated for American neutrality in WWI and showed recognition for the burden of assimilation weighing on German communities, he was likely to be supported by German Americans even without any prospect of success at the national level. Two examples illustrate this: Ferguson was a former Democrat who opposed prohibition. His presidential campaign for the American Party in 1920 was limited to Texas, but recorded its highest gains in German American counties across the state. Four years later, in 1924, the former Republican La Follette ran on a progressive and socialist third-party platform throughout the U.S. He won Minnesota and came in second in many Midwestern states. La Follette's vigorous opposition to the American entry into WWI secured his German American support (cf. Brøndal 2011). In Texas, he led the ballot in Gillespie and Comal County, precisely where German heritage is still strongest when measured by language use, for instance (Boas 2009). In 1940, when American military involvement into World War II was to be expected, counties with strong German American heritage across America defected from Roosevelt's New Deal coalition. The Democratic vote share dropped by 35% in many German American counties, swinging several states into the Republican fold (Rippley 1976: 210f, Lubell 1956: 137ff).

War-time patriotism not only affected German Americans but led to a more general reduction of the role of hyphenated identities in white America. The 1960s saw a revival of interest in ethnic voting patterns in urban and regional politics (Dahl 1963, Wolfinger 1965, Miller 1971). Often voting patterns of specific European American groups were so obvious that they were examined alongside African Americans. Interestingly, however, German Americans never reemerged as a perceivable ethnic group (Glazer & Moynihan 1966: 312). Many German Americans like Donald Trump's father not only submerged their ethnicity, but intensified forms of 'social mimicry', e. g. by claiming another ancestry[3]

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[3] E.g. the Trumps claimed to be Swedish American for many years **(**Blair 2015, Trump & Schwartz 1988).

and deliberately ceasing to pass on German to their children. 'German America' became a topic of historians. In 2015, *The Economist* described German Americans as a "silent minority", adding that "America's largest ethnic group has assimilated so well that people barely notice it".[4] However, complete assimilation is an unlikely outcome for large groups of regional concentration in migration history.

In the mid-1950s, upon a visit to a number of counties in the Midwest with decades of non-interventionist voting patterns, Samuel Lubell stumbled upon the obvious link to German American heritage (Lubell 1956: 137ff). One of the counties he visited was Stearns County in Minnesota according to Conzen (1991), a prime example of how German immigrants created local cultures that shaped "non-group as well as group life at the local level" and reproduced in every institution of the broad local community. The county is rural and overwhelmingly German Catholic. At the time, most children still acquired German as their first language on the farm and learned English later. The county had been in favor of La Follette in 1924, and had defected from the New Deal Coalition before WWII. Lubell's interviews also document a distinct opposition to the Korean War. A check into more recent voting data indicates that isolationist tendencies in Stearns County had not evaporated towards the end of the 20th century: In 1992, presidential candidate Ross Perot with his vocal opposition to the Gulf War and protectionist agenda on trade received 25% of the vote in the county – 6% above his national vote share average. Donald Trump left the Republican Party in 1999 to launch an unsuccessful presidential campaign in Perot's Reform Party primaries.[5] As the Republican nominee of 2016 he swept Stearns County with a near 60%, while Minnesota as a State narrowly remained in the Democratic fold. What the Reform party candidates had in common is that they posed a challenge to the political establishment as outsiders. While it is hard to pigeonhole them ideologically, a common 'America first' approach is apparent. Places like Stearns County could be examples of an ethno-political link – a faint but palpable pulse of isolationism in German American counties across America. While German American communities dropped off the radar of research in recent decades, political undercurrents in these communities may have resurfaced in 2016 in form of support for the anti-establishment, protectionist outsider.

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[4] https://www.economist.com/united-states/2015/02/05/the-silent-minority
[5] https://edition.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/stories/1999/10/25/trump.cnn/index.html

3 The recent role of European ethnicity in American politics

Identifying to what degree a community has 'ethnic' character used to be an intricate task for migration historians. A revolutionary tool for the study of ethnicity in the U.S. was the introduction of the ancestry question in the census of 1980. The open-ended question which allows respondents to specify a maximum of two ancestries was repeated decennially and replicated later in the American Community Survey (ACS). The resulting data was standardized and can be compared based on first, second and single ancestry indications.[6] In a discussion of the ancestry question, Farley (1991: 426) observed a high fluctuation of self-reported ancestry indications among European Americans and concluded that "ancestry has become an optional component of one's self-identification" confirming a suggestion by Gans (1979) that expressions of European ancestry were merely "symbolic" without reflecting a deeper social reality. According to Farley (1991) as well as Lieberson and Waters (1988), the results of the 1980 census showed that ancestry had lost its relation to factors of education, occupation, earnings, residence, or marriage choice. Based on a study of ethnicity in Albany, New York, Alba (1990) confirmed that the role of European ethnicity in the U.S. was fading as indicated by intermarriage (four in five marriages) and lack of residential segregation.

However, these interpretations miss the impact of external factors on ethnic self-identification and they neglect the regional concentration of ethnic communities. In 1980, 49 Million Americans claimed German heritage, which amounted to 21,5% of the population. Closely following the 21,9% indications of English ancestry, German Americans were the second largest ancestry group. Ten years later, the number jumped to 58 Million Americans indicating German ancestry - nearly a fourth of the population. By accident or not, the years 1989/90 also mark a period in which Germany made positive headlines with the Fall of the Berlin Wall and reunification. It appears likely that external factors could very well reactivate a certain ethnic consciousness. The fact that German Americans remained the largest ancestry group in the U.S. ever since, speaks to such a reemerging and remaining ancestral awareness. Though the total number of German ancestry indications declined to 42 Million in 2000 and 2010, the geographic concentration of German Americans and other ancestry groups is also not shifting. The United States Map Gallery which illustrates ethnic concentrations across America (Kilpinen 2014) shows that German ancestry is highest in the Midwest. The American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year-estimates between 2011 and 2015, the German ancestry share was highest in

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[6] In the 2020 census the questions on ancestry and race were combined for the first time, raising some questions about the comparability to previous formats. These issues are not relevant for this paper.

1170 of 3111 counties nationwide.[7] In 950 counties, people who indicated 'German' as their first, second or single ancestry made up a quarter of the population. In 281 counties one fifth of the population indicated single German ancestry. Such high rates of endogamy do not appear improbable, because of the regional and rural concentration of German Americans in many Midwestern States.

Another problem with the early dismissal of ancestral self-identification as a relevant variable for ethnic behavior is the existence of more recent evidence to the contrary, in politics in particular. Geographic concentrations of white ethnic groups persist in New England and were related to voting behavior in the presidential elections of 1992, 1996 and 2000 (Gimpel & Cho 2004). As in other areas of the country, German Americans were found to be "distinctly non-urban" (ibid: 996) and not unlike other places and times, the group swung back and forth from Democrat to Republican between 1992 and 1996 (ibid: 1001). Gimpel & Cho (2004) matched election data with ethnic data at the township level. However, they rightfully point out, that micro- and macro-level data would only tell part of the story, because

> ethnic influence may diffuse. Voters may socialize neighbors and their offspring to express
> and sustain political views that might otherwise be washed away by other forces. A brand
> of politics emerging from distant ethnic roots can influence offspring and nearby others
> who are completely uninformed about ethnicity. (ibid: 988)

In this view, the township or county level deserves the same attention as geographic concentrations of white ancestry groups or individual level data.

That ethnic experiences can still gain traction in today's political arena became particularly clear for one of the fastest growing self-identified groups in recent years. So-called 'Unhyphenated Americans' no longer indicate an affiliation with any specific European ancestry in surveys and instead specify their ancestry as simply 'American.' This group has high concentrations in the Appalachian region (Perez & Hirschman 2009). Unhyphenated voters seem to have played a key role during the Republican primaries leading to Trump's candidacy in 2016 (Irwin & Katz 2016, Arbour & Teigen 2016). This was also confirmed in the Morning Consult poll where Unhyphenated Americans closely followed German Americans. However, unhyphenated rejection of the Democratic Party has a longer history and was already apparent during the Obama years (Arbour & Teigen 2011). Unhyphenated Americans followed a trajectory of increasing their support for the modern Republican Party in the 2016 election, and Arbour (2018) concludes that Trump was very likely not the cause of their support for the Republican

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[7] Due to a mismatch of voting precincts and census districts Alaska is excluded from the analysis in this paper.

ticket in the Appalachian region. Figure 1 compares the voting behavior for all presidential elections since 1984 in counties with 20% or more "Unhyphenated Americans" (N=355) with counties of 20% or more inhabitants of "German" ancestry (N=1295). As a reference, we also include the nationwide average vote share for Republicans and Democrats. The vote shares only build on the two main parties: The Republican Party and the Democratic Party. In most elections between 1984 and 2016 the Republican and Democratic vote share reached more than 98% together. We see a small deviation of 95% in 2000 and 94% in 2016, a larger deviation of 90% in 1996 and the largest in the 1992 election where the two largest parties only gained together 80% of the vote share due to the Reform Party candidacy of Ross Perot. The patterns in Figure 1 confirm Arbour's (2018) observation that Unhyphenated American counties (in blue) have been leaving the Democratic fold and increasing their support for the modern Republicans in a continuous process since in the mid-nineties.

Figure 1: Comparison of general election results in German American and Unhyphenated American Counties from 1984 (Reagan) to 2016 (Trump)
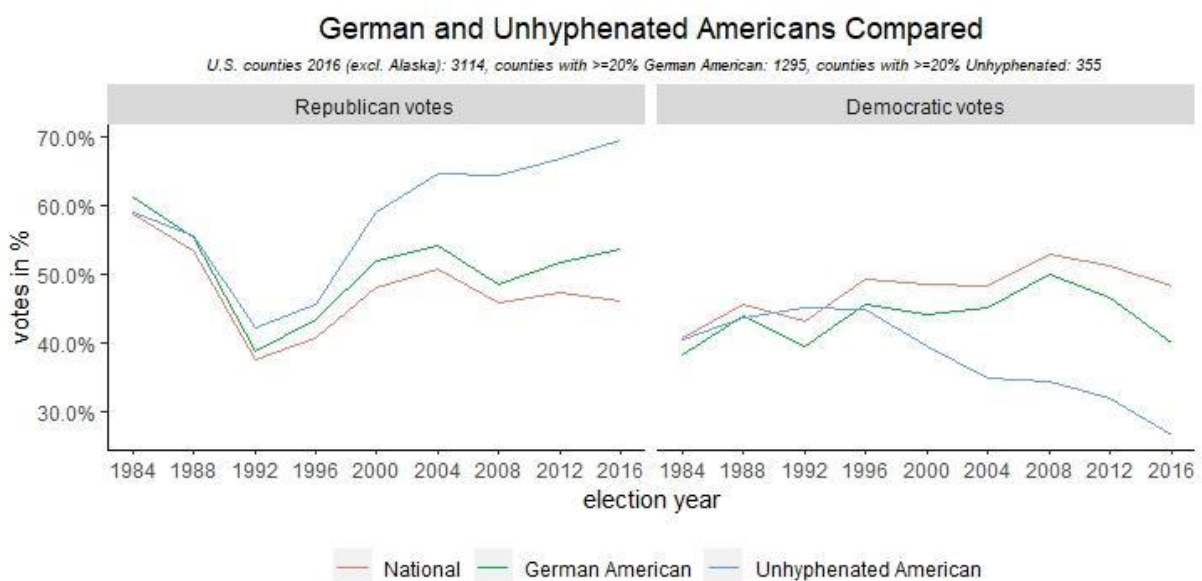
By contrast, the German American voting record across parties appears to be less straightforward. German American counties (in green) have conservative leanings but vote closely along the line of the national vote share of either party in Figure 1. One notable exception is that the nationwide vote share average of the Republican Party decreased from 2012 to 2016, while the average vote share of the German American counties increased. In fact, 2016 marks the first time that the nationwide average for the Republican Party is decreasing while the average of the Republican vote in German American counties is strongly increasing. At the same time, the nationwide vote share average of the Democratic

Party also somewhat decreased from 2012 to 2016, but decreased nearly twice as much in German American counties. The question whether these developments actually reflect a 'Trump Effect' on American voters with German ancestry or whether it is just a side effect of the broad geographic distribution of counties with 20% German ancestry or more (1295 counties) leads to our first set of hypotheses:

H1a: The higher a county's share of German ancestry the higher the vote share for the Republican Presidential Candidate in 2016.

H1b: The higher a county's share of German ancestry the lower the vote share for the Democratic Presidential Candidate in 2016.

If we show that the share of German ancestry is associated with an increase of Republican vote share and at the same time to a decrease of the vote shares of the Democrats in 2016, how can we be sure that Trump did it and such a pattern does not simply reflect a realignment, i.e. a long-term trend in favor of the Republican party? If there is a "Trump Effect" in favor of the Republicans rather than a long-term trend, we should find evidence for two observable implications. We should find on the one hand a stronger effect of the share of German ancestry in 2016 than in 2012 and, thus, the share of German ancestry should systematically increase the relative difference between the 2016 and 2012 Republican vote share at the county level.

H2a: The higher a county's share of German ancestry the higher the gain in Republican vote share in 2016 relative to 2012.

On the other hand, the share of German ancestry should increase the relative difference between the 2016 and 2012 Republican vote share more than at the previous pair of elections between 2012 and 2008.

H2b: The higher a county's share of German ancestry the higher the difference between the Republican tickets of 2012 and 2016 as opposed to the Republican tickets of 2008 and 2012.

The relevance of German American voting behavior for Trump's victory does not immediately follow from the previous hypotheses. We need to understand whether counties of German American character indeed played a distinct role in 2016 and voted systematically different from other white groups in recent elections. In order to provide answers, all our models include the county share of the

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largest European ancestry groups, namely German, Unhyphenated American, English, Irish, and Italian. If German American counties are not a mere reflection of a greater 'white vote', where would they differ from the other groups? Figure 1 shows that the withdrawal from the Democratic Party increased in 2016 and appears steeper than for Unhyphenated American counties. This observation ties in with the possibility that the role of German Americans was indeed more decisive in the outcome of the 2016 election than the role of other groups. If German Americans swung in favor of Trump like the German media predicted, we would expect a close relationship between the swing and German American counties:

H3a: The higher the share of German ancestry the more likely the county is located in a swing state that flipped from blue in 2012 to red in 2016.

In fact, Figure 1 which was calculated using total ancestry indications illustrates an important problem of current ancestry research that we tackle in this paper: the cut-off of 20% is arbitrary, and it is unclear what exactly it means for a county to be predominantly 'German-American' or dominated by Unhyphenated Americans. Although the historic influence of German ancestry on a county likely correlates with the size of the group (and the corresponding ancestry indications), the influence might be stronger where German ancestry is leading. For instance, if German Americans make up 30% in a county, but Unhyphenated Americans also make up 30% of the population, there should be no talk of a German-dominant county. However, if German American make up 30% in a county and lead with a clear distance of 15% to the second largest ethnic or ancestral group, German ancestry should clearly influence the county's political behavior, and we would expect a local political swing vote to be far more likely.

H3b: The more dominant the share of German ancestry is at the county level within the swing states, the more likely we are dealing with a county that went Democrat in 2012 and Republican in 2016.

We will test these hypotheses using the 2012 election results as a reference point. Between the 2012 and 2016 election, we see six states supporting Obama in 2012 as well as Donald Trump in 2016. Five of these states lie along traditional areas of German settlement spanning from Pennsylvania in the East to Oregon in the West. A number of counties voted both for Obama in 2012 and for Trump in 2016 (Uhrmacher et al. 2016). If there was a relationship between the swing states, the swinging counties within these states and German ancestry, it would be a confirmation of a long tradition of ambiguous German voting behavior. However not all counties along the so-called "German belt" are clearly dominated by German heritage. Unhyphenated Americans also play a crucial role with reference to their dispersion and will be included in our analysis.

This brings us to the final point of this paper: Why did German Americans vote for Trump? It would be simplistic to reduce the "German-American-Trump connection" to the candidate's ethnic roots. Yet, we believe his agenda addressed the experience or collective consciousness of German-American communities. Like many of the early analysis of Trump's election, Urlaub & Huenlich (2016) suggest that economic issues stood at the forefront of German American voting behavior. By contrast, Oberhauser et al. (2019) have claimed that people who voted for Trump in 2016 were less motivated by economic factors but by their white social identity and nativism. They show that in the Iowa-swing, being white significantly correlated with Trump support. Using measures of racism denial, Reny et al. (forthcoming) also connect the Trump Swing to conservative attitudes on race among working class white voters. Both contributions see racial anxiety at work in the swing vote. However, in another study racism denial accounted for part of Donald Trump's support among white voters, while negative stereotypes of African and Hispanic Americans were not predictive (Schaffner et al. 2018: 33). Also, arguing that racial anxiety became the driving force of swing voters who also supported the first African American president is not immediately plausible. We argue that Donald Trump's political past requires more attention. A close look at Figure 1 shows that Trump was not the only German American who was attracted to Ross Perot's Reform Party. In 1992, there was a steeper drop in German American support for both the Republican and Democrat Party than on the national level, reflecting the support of the third party. Unhyphenated Americans – especially if Democratic – were far less attracted to this candidate.

If the German American experience matters, our fourth hypothesis makes the most obvious connection explicit.

H4: *The higher the share of German ancestry the more likely the county supports political outsiders with a non-interventionist and isolationist agenda.*

To test this hypothesis, we have to turn our attention to the third-party candidates of the 1920s or the post-Cold War Reform Party phenomenon with candidates such as Ross Perot. Most recently, Barack Obama also fulfilled some of these criteria. He fervently opposed the Iraq War in 2003, defeated established politicians in the primaries of 2007, and was the first African American to run in a general election. Again, Figure 1 looks promising: It shows a peak of support for Obama and a clear difference between German American and Unhyphenated voting behavior in 2008. If our assumption holds, outsiders would systematically benefit from the German American vote.

To sum up, we argue that below the radar of public opinion analysts there is an interesting group of voters, German Americans, who consistently supported Donald Trump in large numbers at the 2016 election. We show that, while traditionally conservative, German Americans were particularly attracted to Trump as a presidential candidate. Using county-level data, our analysis proceeds in three steps: First, we will show that in 2016 there is a systematic support pattern among German Americans for Republicans and, particularly, for Trump when compared with previous presidential elections. Second, we show that the consistent support pattern we uncover is particularly relevant for the voting returns in swing states that supported Obama in 2012 but Trump in 2016. Third, we provide evidence using historical data that German Americans traditionally seem to support presidential candidates with similar personal characteristics: political outsiders who 'stick it to the establishment', exhibit isolationist tendencies and oppose American wars overseas have an easier time making gains in the community. We also show that these characteristics seem to be less attractive and even unattractive for voters of other European ancestry groups. Thus, the decision of voters to self-report as having German ancestry is related to different voting patterns than the other comparable ancestry groups. An individual's decision to self-classify as German American rather than Unhyphenated American has at least in the aggregate on the county level strong political connotations.

4 Data and Methods

The American National Election Study (ANES) does not allow us to study German American voting behavior at the individual level because ancestry is not part of the survey. Our study therefore uses aggregated data for 3114 counties from various sources. Counties of the State of Alaska had to be excluded from our analysis because of repeated redistricting since 1984 and the resulting difficulties to map election data onto ancestry data. We rely on country level voting returns to which we merge self-reported first and second ethnic ancestry information as shares of county inhabitants using the newest available data before the respective election. Data for the Republican and Democratic vote shares at the county level between 1984 and 2016 were extracted from the Congressional Quarterly (Congressional Quarterly Voting and Elections Collection 2019) and were cross-checked with data from the Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections (Leip 2019a). Matching ancestry data for the largest white ancestry groups in previous years was extracted from the NHGIS data base for the census years of 1980, 1990 and 2000 as well as from the 5-year estimates of the American Community Survey (ACS) in 2009, 2011 and 2015 (Manson et al. 2019). The ancestry question in all surveys is open-ended and allows respondents to report up to two ancestries. This entails that anybody indicating more than one ancestry is counted in several ancestry groups, and the total of ancestry indications always exceeds

the county population. At the same time, it is possible for respondents to only indicate a single ancestry. The totals of each ancestry are then a combination of multiple and single indications of any given ancestry. If ancestry indications are connected to identity, however, it seems that single ancestry indications should be the hallmark of defining the influence of German identity on a county. We therefore use single ancestry as the basis of our regression analyses throughout this paper. In the appendix (Table 8 to 11), we present all analyses with total ancestry data to demonstrate that our results also hold for total ancestry shares with two exceptions.

As mentioned above, we also need to guard against the ecological fallacy of interpreting simple shares of the county population as signs of 'German dominance'. Our analysis of voting behavior at the local level within the swing states proceeds with help of a dominance measure of German ancestry. Our dominance measure builds on the work of Davide Vampa (2020: 92) who develops a new measure of party dominance:

$$Dominance\ (d) = Absolute * Relative = s * (s/c)$$

Vampa's (2020) intention is to develop a clearly conceptualized and operationalized measure of party dominance. His study defines dominance as a combination of absolute and relative dominance. For party dominance, absolute dominance means to include the percentage of parliamentary seats won by the largest party and relative dominance to include the largest party's main competitor's percentage of seats as well. We apply and adjust this measure for ancestry dominance as our reasoning is very similar to Vampa's concept of party dominance. For ancestry dominance, s is the share of the highest ancestry in the respective county and c is the share of the second highest ancestry. We use the formula to calculate dominance measures for German, Unhyphenated, English, Irish and Italian ancestry. Where an ancestry that is not the first highest in a county is coded as 0. For instance, in a county with the highest ancestry of 40% German and the second highest ancestry of 25% Unhyphenated, *Unhyphenated dominant* is coded as 0. Whereas *German dominant* would be 0.64 (*d* = 0.4 * (0.4/0.25)).

The dependent variable used in models 1 to 5 and 8 to 9 is the Democratic and Republican county *vote share* between the elections 2004 to 2016. It is a continuous measure and calculated as percentages of the county vote. The Republican vote share of the 2016 election is used in model 1, whilst the Democratic one is used in model 2. The dependent variable of model 3 is based on the percent difference between the Republican and the Democratic vote share of 2016. In model 4, we use the Republican Party's percent vote share difference of the 2016 and the 2012 election. The dependent variable of model 5 is calculated as the difference between the Republican and Democratic vote shares

in 2016 (as used in model 3) minus the difference between the Republican and Democratic vote shares in 2012. Model 8 analyzes the Republican vote share of 2008 and model 9 the Democratic Party's percent vote share difference of the 2008 and the 2004 election. The dependent variable *swing state* that is used in model 6 is a binary variable. A county is coded as 1, if the county lies within a state that swung from a Democratic vote share majority in 2012 to a Republican vote share majority in 2016, and it is coded as 0 otherwise. *Swing county* is a second binary variable that is used in model 7. A county is coded as 1, if the county swung from a Democratic vote share majority in 2012 to a Republican vote share majority in 2016, and it is coded as 0 otherwise. In this model, we only look at swing-state counties. Our sample is therefore reduced to 476 counties. The dependent variables of the last three models build on the vote shares of Ross Perot in 1992 (model 10), James Ferguson in 1920 (model 11), and Robert La Follette in 1924 (model 12) (Leip 2019b/c, Congressional Quarterly Voting and Elections Collection 2019).

Models 1 to 6, 8 to 9 and 12 build on the same group of independent variables. The ancestry variables are *German*, *Unhyphenated*, *English*, *Irish*, and *Italian ancestry*. They are continuously measured and calculated as the share of each county's total population. *American South* is a binary variable that controls for whether a county belongs to the American South or not. A county is coded as 1, if the county belongs to one of the below listed states and 0 otherwise. The American South contains the following states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

In Model 7, our dominance measure comes into play. We include two independent variables measuring German and Unhyphenated dominance: *German dominant* and *Unhyphenated dominant*. Whilst we also calculate the dominance of English, Irish and Italian ancestry, they are not included in the regression as they are omitted during the analysis due to a very low number of English, Irish and Italian dominant counties. In our subsample of 476 swing-state counties, German ancestry share is highest in 326, Unhyphenated in 119, English in one, Irish in three and Italian in seven of those counties.

5 Results

5.1 The German American vote and the 'Trump Effect' in 2016

A first conclusion we can draw from a descriptive perspective offered in Figure 1 is that Donald Trump did well in areas with a high number of self-identified German Americans. However, can the electoral success of Trump with German Americans be attributed to him as a candidate or is it rather a reflection of a long-term trend, a realignment favoring the party he is running for? Did self-identified German

Americans support Trump because he was running as a Republican or because of his personal attributes?

We proceed in two steps. First, we show that there is a substantially polarizing effect of German ancestry on the Republican and Democratic vote shares across counties in the 2016 presidential election. Second, we test hypotheses 2a and 2b that help us to distinguish whether the uncovered polarizing effect of German ancestry is not only due to a larger realignment trend in favor of the Republican party or also due to the candidate himself.

In Table 1, we present the effects of single German ancestry on the Republican and Democratic vote share at the county level in 2016. Both models include as covariates the five largest white ancestral or ethnic groups in the U. S., i.e. the largest European ancestries, namely German, Irish, English and Italian, as well as Unhyphenated Americans in addition to a South dummy. Model 1 and 2 provide support for our hypotheses 1 and 2. Model 3 allows us to combine both effects: The German ancestry share is highly significant indicating that with a 1 percentage point increase in the share of German ancestry counties have on average a 1 percentage point higher Republican vote share and similarly a 1 percentage point lower vote share for Clinton in 2016. Together the effect in favor of Trump rather than Clinton is about 2 percentage points, as can be seen in Model 3, for every 1 percentage point increase in the share of German ancestry. A closer look at the other ancestry groups shows that the share of Unhyphenated and Irish American ancestry both show very similar patterns as we expect for the German Americans. Though, the exact opposite holds for counties with a high share of English and Italian ancestry. These patterns nicely illustrate that upon closer investigation the 'white vote' is not a homogenous coalition of voters. So far, the results establish as expected that there is a substantially polarizing effect of German ancestry on the Republican and Democratic vote shares across counties in the 2016 presidential election. In the next step, we need to uncover evidence whether this result is due to a larger realignment trend in favor of the republican party or an effect of the candidate himself.

Table 1: Regression table investigating white ancestry groups in the 2016 general election

	Vote Share 2016	
(1)	(2)	(3)
Trump/ Pence (Republican)	Clinton/ Kaine (Democratic)	Rep. 2016 - Dem. 2016

German Ancestry	1.043***	-0.962***	2.006***
	(0.038)	(0.037)	(0.075)
Unhyphenated Ancestry	0.629***	-0.575***	1.204***
	(0.034)	(0.033)	(0.067)
English Ancestry	0.982***	-1.229***	2.211***
	(0.087)	(0.085)	(0.172)
Irish Ancestry	2.078***	-1.804***	3.882***
	(0.162)	(0.158)	(0.318)
Italian Ancestry	-1.431***	1.566***	-2.997***
	(0.176)	(0.172)	(0.347)
American South Dummy	5.275***	-1.083	6.358***
	(0.599)	(0.585)	(1.177)
Constant	36.75***	54.79***	-18.04***
	(0.844)	(0.824)	(1.660)

N	3112	3112	3112
adj. R^2	0.370	0.357	0.363

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

What would be an observable implication that the result of the 2016 Presidential election is also due to a 'Trump effect' rather than merely a tendency that German Americans are more likely to vote Republican than Democrat? In the following we present two pieces of evidence. First, we should find

a stronger effect of the share of German ancestry in the election with Trump as candidate compared to the results of the 2012 election at the county level (*H2a*). Second, if Trump increased the Republican vote share more than one would expect, based on the change in Republican vote share between 2008 and 2012, then the share of German ancestry should be positively related to the additional increase in Republican vote share between 2016 and 2012 over the increase between 2008 and 2012 (*H2b*).

Table 2 contains a number of models that allow us to investigate a possible 'Trump effect' more directly. Again both models include as covariates the five largest white ancestries, namely German, Irish, English and Italian, as well as Unhyphenated Americans in addition to a South dummy. Model 4 tests *H2a* and provides evidence that the share of German ancestry in a county significantly increased the vote share difference between the Republican tickets of Trump in 2016 and Romney in 2012. The highly significant German ancestry share indicates that with a 1 percentage point increase in the share of German ancestry counties have on average a 0.2 percentage point higher difference in the Republican vote share between 2016 and 2012. In Model 5, we also find evidence for *H2b* where German ancestry significantly increases the Republican vote share differences between 2016-2012 and 2012-2008. The German ancestry share is highly significant indicating that with a 1 percentage point increase in the share of German ancestry counties have on average a 0.08 percentage point higher difference between the Republican vote share 2016 and 2012 compared to the Republican vote share 2012 and 2008. Again, the share of Unhyphenated and Irish ancestry both show a very similar picture compared to German ancestry, and English and Italian exactly the opposite. The results confirm our assumption that our previous findings are not solely based on a larger realignment trend but on an effect of the candidate, namely Trump, himself. In the next step, we investigate whether these findings provide a substantial contribution to explaining how Trump won the 2016 presidential election. We therefore examine how the share of German ancestry affected the likelihood of a county to lie within a state won by Obama in 2012 and by Trump in 2016.

Table 2: Further differences in white voting behavior in 2016 and previous elections

	(4)	(5)
	Rep. 2016 - Rep. 2012	Diff (Rep. - Rep. 2016/2012) - Diff (Rep. - Rep. 2012/2008)
German Ancestry	**0.203**[***]	**0.076*****
	(0.016)	(0.02)

Unhyphenated Ancestry	0.229***	0.131***
	(0.014)	(0.018)
English Ancestry	-0.388***	-0.559***
	(0.037)	(0.046)
Irish Ancestry	0.786***	0.611***
	(0.068)	(0.085)
Italian Ancestry	-0.319***	-0.089
	(0.074)	(0.092)
American South Dummy	-1.117***	0.825**
	(0.250)	(0.313)
Constant	-0.701*	-1.422**
	(0.353)	(0.441)
N	3112	3112
adj. R^2	0.193	0.073

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

5.2 German American dynamics in the Obama-Trump-Swing

So far, the evidence indicates that Trump was more attractive to German Americans than Clinton in 2016 and gained more traction than Republican candidate Mitt Romney in 2012. It is not immediately evident why this paper should be about German Americans, though. At first glance, the results look like there is a larger group of white voters encompassing German, Irish and Unhyphenated American ancestries that was drawn specifically to Trump more than one would expect on partisanship alone. But does such a coalition of voters really exist? As Arbour & Teigen 2011 show, Unhyphenated Americans rejected Obama early on. Arbour (2018) shows how this trend continued. The same cannot be said for German Americans. With Florida being the exception, five of the states that turned out for Obama in 2008 and 2012 and for Trump in 2016 lie along the so-called 'German Belt'. From East to

West these states are Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin and Iowa. After demonstrating that German ancestry systematically influenced the Republican and Democratic vote share in 2016 (*H1a*, *H1b*), that there very likely was a 'Trump effect' (*H2b, H2b*), we now investigate our third set of hypotheses. *H3a* states that an increase in the share of single German ancestry increased the likelihood that a county lies in a state won by Obama/Biden in 2012 and by Trump/Pence in 2016. Table 4 holds evidence that supports this hypothesis. With increasing German ancestry, a county is more likely to lie in a state that swung from the Democrats in 2012 to the Republicans in 2016, holding everything else constant. Also, although Unhyphenated and Irish Americans supported Trump in 2016, they had no impact on the thin margins by which Trump won several of the Swing states. Italian counties are also more likely to lie in a swing state, but they did not support Trump, as the previous models showed.

Table 3: Logistic Regression predicting if counties lie in a Democratic to Republican Swing State in 2016

	(6)
	County in Democratic to Republican Swing State (2012 to 2016)
German Ancestry	**0.064**[***]
	(0.008)
Unhyphenated Ancestry	0.004
	(0.010)
English Ancestry	-0.123[***]
	(0.034)
Irish Ancestry	0.006
	(0.043)
Italian Ancestry	0.258[***]
	(0.035)

American South Dummy	-0.896***
	(0.168)
Constant	-2.037***
	(0.207)
N	3112

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The substantial impact of German American ancestry on Trump's victory is further illustrated in Figure 2. The figure builds on a scenario where all the other ancestries are set to their mean and counties do not belong to the American South. Whilst we must be careful with inferences drawn from German ancestry shares higher than 30 percent per county (65 von 3,111 counties) as the rug plot shows, we can be relatively sure about the effects below 30 percent. The figure reveals that between German ancestry shares of 0 to 30 percent, the predicted probability of a county lying within a state swinging from Democrat to Republican increases from about 10 percent to more than 40 percent. Substantially, this reveals that German Americans had a considerable impact on the election outcome of the 2016 American presidential election.

Figure 2: Predicted Probabilities of Counties lying in States Swinging from Democratic to Republican in 2016
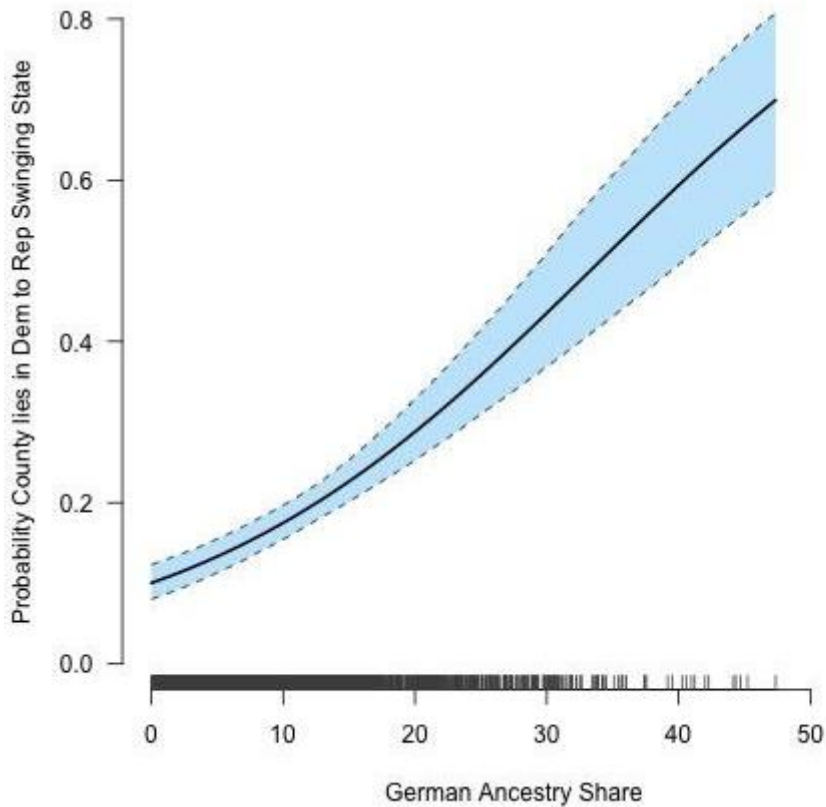
To further gauge the impact of the German American vote, we now zoom in on voting behavior at our level of observation, namely the counties within the swing states. To this end, we contrast the counties that exhibit steady voting behavior with those counties that flipped from an Obama majority in 2012 to a Trump majority 2016. Although this 'county swing' was not decisive for the swing at the state-level, it yet again shows the weight of German ancestry within the states, especially when we consider the degree to which German ancestry dominates a county. Our hypothesis H3b states that the more dominant the share of German ancestry, the more likely we are dealing with a county that voted Democrat in 2012 and Republican in 2016.

Table 4 shows the results of a logistic regression (Model 7), using the continuous dominance measure for German American and Unhyphenated American counties in the swing states. At the significance level of $p < 0.1$ there is a positive effect of being increasingly German dominated on the likelihood of being a 'Swing County' and a reverse relationship for Unhyphenated American dominance. However, the evidence of a leading role of German dominant counties also has a geographic component that is not captured in the model. Calculating a first difference between German dominant (taking the value of the highest observed percentile) and Unhyphenated dominant counties (taking the value of the highest observed percentile), the results indicate that such a German dominant county is about 30

(95% CI: [5,50]) percentage points more likely than an Unhyphenated dominant county to swing from a Democratic to a Republican majority in 2016.

Table 4: Logistic regression of Swing-State Counties swinging from Democratic to Republican

	(7) Swing-county (in a swing-state 2016)
German Dominant	**0.164***
	(0.097)
Unhyphenated Dominant	-0.940*
	(0.541)
Constant	-1.604***
	(0.185)
N	476

Standard errors in parentheses

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

Figure 3 shows the five swing states that are positioned along the so-called German-belt. They are Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania from left to right. The graph identifies counties that swung from Democrat to Republican between 2012 and 2016 within these states. Counties that experienced no swing are not shaded. The swing counties are broken down into three categories: First, there are counties which are 'German dominant' by the most conservative application of our measure. These dark shaded counties lie in the upper tertile of the measure, meaning that there is a clear distance between German Americans and other ancestries. The mean margin by which German ancestry leads in these counties is around 16%. Typically, this entails that over 40% of the entire population in the county claimed German ancestry. The second category in Figure 3 are counties where German Americans make up a majority but are not as dominant. These counties lie in the lower two tertiles of our dominance measure, meaning that they dominate other ancestries by a lower margin, usually between 1% and 6%. The third category of swing counties is labeled as 'other'. It includes all swing counties with an Unhyphenated, English, Irish or Italian ethnic lead. Our analysis in Table 4 shows

that German dominant counties are most susceptible to swinging. The map in Figure 3 reveals a clear geographic concentration: only few and scattered swing counties in the East, but a cluster of swing counties in the West. At the core of this cluster are 22 bordering German dominant counties in Northeast Iowa and Southwest Wisconsin. The counties form the bulk of a region that collectively voted for Barack Obama in 2012 and later for Donald Trump in 2016. Some other swing counties of the other categories are connected to them. The swing in this region was clearly a German-led phenomenon.

Figure 3: Map of the Swing Counties within the Midwestern Swing States
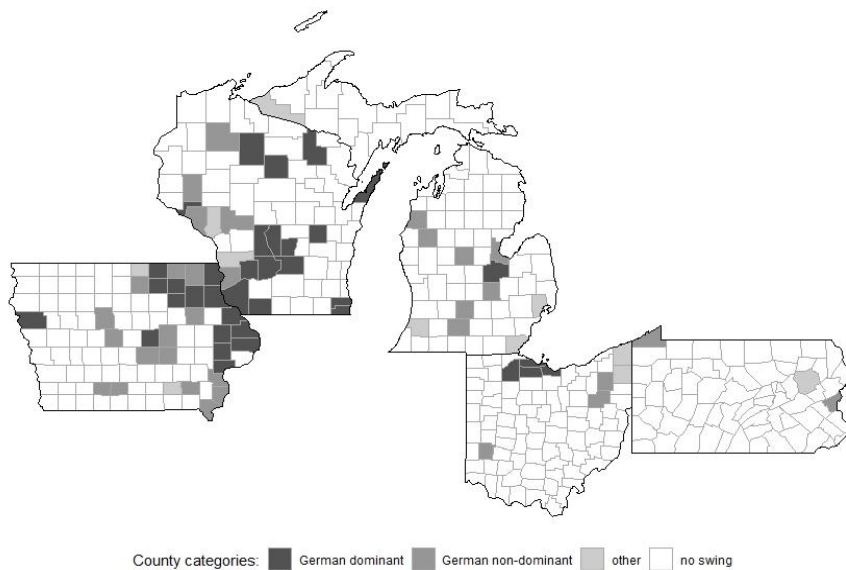
The cluster in Figure 3 has some telling characteristics. It is a rural region with a total of around 700,000 inhabitants - which is typical for areas of German settlement. The region is connected through the Wisconsin River which runs into the Mississippi river. Politically, this is a swing region: Ronald Reagan was supported with 56% of the vote in 1984, before the region turned Democrat in 1988. Isolationist tendencies are also visible: In 1992, third-Party candidate Ross Perot received 4.5 % above the national average in the region. However, the regional majority remained narrowly blue throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. Yet, another outsider received more support than usual in this region: When Barack Obama became the Democratic candidate in 2008, he scored a whopping 58% in the 22 counties, over 60% in some of them. The percentage of African Americans was around 1%, meaning that Obama had strong white support in these German American counties. With a vote share of nearly 52%, Trump's support in the region was not as pronounced, but the swing was substantial.

5.3 Probing the causal mechanism

These observations feed into our last hypothesis, namely that the German American affinity for political outsiders can be illustrated historically. If we consider the few things Obama and Trump had in common at their inauguration, one could argue that both candidates posed a challenge to the establishment in Washington. They may have benefited from a legacy of German American attraction to political outsiders. Both candidates also stood in opposition to the Iraq War, which could resonate with the anti-war sentiment documented historically in German American communities (Lubell 1956). From the regional view, we now return to the national level to test our hypothesis. If our interpretation of Obama's outsider appeal is true, we would expect less of a polarizing effect between the parties in 2008. There should either be a lack of rejection or even support for the Democratic candidate. In 2012, when Obama was no longer an outsider, we would expect a familiar polarizing pattern of German American voting behavior regarding their support for Republicans and Democrats. Table 5 reveals that our assumption holds. While counties with stronger German American ancestry voted significantly conservative in both elections, there also is a shift from a lack of rejection of Obama in 2008 to significant rejection of the incumbent candidate Obama in 2012. Note, that Irish and Unhyphenated counties decidedly rejected Obama from the beginning while German American counties exhibit a shift in attitude. This observation underlines that even in more recent elections, German Americans have been less strictly aligned with the Republican Party than other groups of white Americans when a political outsider was on the scene.

Table 5: Regression table investigating white ancestry groups in the 2008 general election

	Vote Share 2008	
	(8)	(9)
	McCain/ Palin (Republican)	Dem. 2008 - Dem. 2004
German Ancestry	**0.679**[***]	**-0.009**
	(0.032)	(0.013)

Unhyphenated Ancestry	0.294***	-0.123***
	(0.031)	(0.012)
English Ancestry	1.149***	-0.017
	(0.077)	(0.03)
Irish Ancestry	1.328***	-0.684***
	(0.134)	(0.052)
Italian Ancestry	-0.904***	0.151**
	(0.146)	(0.057)
American South Dummy	7.739***	-3.056***
	(0.559)	(0.218)
Constant	35.22***	7.758***
	(0.798)	(0.311)
N	3113	3113
adj. R^2	0.296	0.260

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

As mentioned in Sections 2 and 3, the end of the Cold War saw a resurrection of 'America First' politicians. The most prominent example is Texas business magnate Ross Perot with his Reform Party movement. His platform pursued protectionist policies and he vocally opposed the Gulf War. Ross Perot ran for President in 1992. We would expect that German Americans supported him above average at the national level and not only in various heavily German American regions. Table 6 confirms that Ross Perot had nation-wide German American support. Other white groups reacted differently: Unhyphenated Americans and Italian Americans opposed Ross Perot, the Irish American

counties supported him far less. Only the English ancestry regions found Perot as attractive as German Americans.

Table 6: Regression table investigating white ancestry groups in the 1992 general election

	Vote Share 1992
	(10)
	Ross Perot
German Ancestry	**0.139**[***]
	(0.011)
Unhyphenated Ancestry	-0.249[***]
	(0.019)
English Ancestry	0.326[***]
	(0.025)
Irish Ancestry	0.115[*]
	(0.047)
Italian Ancestry	-0.183[**]
	(0.057)
American South Dummy	-5.054[***]
	(0.266)
Constant	20.00[***]
	(0.377)

N	3111
adj. R^2	0.438

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Going back to the root of 'America First' politics, namely the era of third-party candidates, we can show that there were important outsiders whose entire campaign was built around German American support. Two candidates stand out for their anti-prohibition and isolationist agenda in the 1920s: James Ferguson, a former 'wet' Democrat, whose 1920s presidential campaign was limited to Texas and Robert La Follette who ran nationwide in 1924 on a progressive and socialist platform. La Follette won his home state of Wisconsin, and scored moderate shares in Minnesota and North Dakota – two heavily German American states. But if La Follette's success in the Midwest was connected to German American support rather than to his regional home advantage, we would also expect La Follette to score high in Southern counties with German American heritage. Using available election data from Texas and matching it with the first available ancestry data from the 1980 census as well as with the more recent 2015 ACS sample estimates, Table 7 shows that our prediction holds. The German American counties of the past 35 years were also home to the voters in Texas who significantly supported Ferguson and La Follette, two outsider politicians of the 1920s. In fact, no other white ethnic voting groups significantly supported these candidates.

Table 7: Regression table investigating white ancestry groups in the 1920 and 1924 general election

	Vote Share of 1920s Third-Party Candidates in Texas	
	(11) Ferguson (1920: American Party)	(12) La Follette (1924: Progressive Party)
German Ancestry 1980	**0.990*** (0.108)	**0.779*** (0.071)
Unhyphenated Ancestry 1980	0.076	0.098

	(0.155)	(0.101)
English Ancestry 1980	-0.084	-0.078
	(0.162)	(0.094)
Irish Ancestry 1980	0.211	-0.543[*]
	(0.439)	(0.221)
Italian Ancestry 1980	3.995	0.687
	(2.465)	(1.628)
Constant	0.956	4.116[**]
	(2.139)	(1.392)
N	246	253
adj. R^2	0.273	0.378
German Ancestry 2015	**1.136[***]**	**1.015[***]**
	(0.184)	(0.132)
Unhyphenated Ancestry 2015	-0.046	-0.107
	(0.154)	(0.110)
English Ancestry 2015	0.550	-0.303
	(0.320)	(0.230)
Irish Ancestry 2015	-0.841	-0.494
	(0.535)	(0.380)
Italian Ancestry 2015	2.568[***]	0.743

	(0.574)	(0.413)
Constant	1.659	3.623[**]
	(1.710)	(1.205)
N	246	253
adj. R^2	0.230	0.220

Standard errors in parentheses

[*] $p < 0.05$, [**] $p < 0.01$, [***] $p < 0.001$

Our examples show: German American counties were repeatedly in support of outsider candidates across the U.S. at the national, state and regional levels. As we argued before, this can be attributed to the outsider experience of German American communities which began long before WWI. Like with other immigrant groups, American nativism followed every step of German American integration. But unlike other groups, German Americans experienced an unusual set-back in their assimilation efforts. The World Wars triggered a nation-wide submergence of German 'identity politics'. This did not mean, however, that local ecologies of the German immigrant brand no longer existed. We assume that until this day, there is a shared political outlook in these communities consisting of conservatism and considerable outsider appeal. Because of their sheer numbers, German Americans have the ability to swing elections if mobilized by an appropriate candidate, as the 2016 election has shown.

6 Conclusion

In summary, our results suggest that German media were spot-on in their prediction that out of the largest white ethnic groups, German Americans would pave the way into the White House for Donald Trump. We uncover a systematic support pattern among German Americans for Republicans and, particularly, for Trump when compared with previous presidential elections at the county level 2016 that do not mirror those of Unhyphenated Americans, Irish Americans or other groups. Furthermore, we show that the consistent support pattern we uncover is particularly relevant for the voting returns in swing states that supported Obama in 2012 but Trump in 2016. German Americans might have made Trump President.

We acknowledge, though, that we cannot rerun history. Our results are correlational and, hence, merely suggestive. For instance, the Trump effect we find could conceivably also be a combination of a positive reaction to Trump as candidate and a gender effect that materializes at the same time as a negative reaction towards Clinton. We cannot disentangle this possibility because, so far, Hillary Clinton is the only female presidential candidate of a major party. In any case, gender effects cannot explain away the candidate effects we find in historical elections. The patterns we uncovered are consistent with our theory of a particular German American vote. More importantly, though, the patterns we find are at the same time inconsistent with expectations of a homogenous pan-ethnic coalition of white voters. In the last step of our analysis we probe the causal mechanism of our theory, using historical election returns. We find that counties with larger shares of German Americans are likely to support outsider candidates across the U.S. at the national, state and regional levels. Consistent with our theory, this is not the case for voters of other European ancestry groups.

Our results show that counties with many voters of German ancestry behave quite differently from counties with many unhyphenated voters. This is particularly striking because it implies that the decision of voters to self-report as having German ancestry rather than identifying as Unhyphenated American has strong political connotations that have not been noticed before. While it is widely accepted that migration and integration experiences as well as racial experiences determine the political behavior of various Hispanic American groups and African Americans, our findings imply that European American experiences of migration and integration are also relevant and of strategic importance. Ancestry and ethnic experiences at the local level remain variables for predicting behavior even today. While the role of ethnic self-identifications among white voters needs closer examination in combination with other social variables, its current exclusion from most analyses is problematic. Crude racial terminology may be shrouding the diverging motivations for different heritage regions to support a specific candidate. Due to the nature of the American presidential election system, it is by no means trivial if crucial swing regions harbor an unusual affinity for political outsiders or hold lingering isolationist views. Our findings entail that established politicians with a record of support for interventionist policies and a free-trade agenda would have a harder time winning the German American vote. At the same time, it appears that racial animosity did not keep many German Americans from supporting Barack Obama in his first term. Attributing racial bias to former Obama supporters who voted for Trump in Iowa and Wisconsin may therefore be a crucial mistake committed on both sides of the political divide.

German Americans also offer a peculiar case study with regard to 'assimilation'. It appears that German Americans dropped from the radar of academic research too early and not for empirical but for

circumstantial historic reasons. Our findings raise the question what being 'assimilated' actually entails and to what extent 'whiteness' is a reliable category when regional identities come into play. At least in the political realm there is converging evidence (Gimpel & Cho 2004) that distinguishable patterns seem to exist. Moreover, Urlaub & Huenlich (2016) suggest that Trump's talk about 'America first' also resonated with German Americans at the economic level - possibly, the most successful area of German American assimilation. However, studies of a connection between political behavior and socioeconomic factors depend on further work in migration studies, sociology and anthropology. There would have to be a shift from an exclusively historical view of German Americans to a more contemporary orientation uncovering the remaining ethnic impact at the national level and in various regions such as the Central Plain of Wisconsin, the Mississippi shores of Iowa or the Texas Hill Country.

Another important question appears to be whether there are other politicians who embody 'American First' tendencies and are supported by the community in a similar way to Donald Trump. Ron Paul and his son Rand Paul are examples of politicians with German American roots that are among the most vocal in their opposition to U.S. military involvement, for instance. Whether ancestry backgrounds of European American politicians and voters are related to their shared political views is an important question for more granular research. The future calls for closer scrutiny of ethno-political links, and possible structures of ethnic community support.

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Appendix:

The tables 8 to 11 in the Appendix replicate our analysis we report in the main body of the paper by using total ancestry as a measure of the size of different voter groups rather than single ancestry. The total ancestry share consists of single ancestry indications and multiple ancestry indications. Multiple ancestry indications should be interpreted as indicators of increased intermarriage (Alba 1990) as would be expected in urban surroundings. The influence of German ancestry is lower in these areas than in rural areas of German settlement which is confirmed in that the effect size is lower in most models below. In general, however, we find the same results for total and single ancestry. The exceptions are Model (9) which is significantly positive and Model (5) which shows no effect.

Table 8: Replication of the regression models 1 to 5 with total instead of single ancestry

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Trump/ Pence (Republican)	Clinton/ Kaine (Democratic)	Rep. 2016 - Dem. 2016	Rep. 2016 - Rep. 2012	Diff (Rep.-Rep. 2016/2012) - Diff (Rep.-Rep. 2012/2008)
German	**0.525*****	**-0.512*****	**1.037*****	**0.0683*****	**-0.015**
Ancestry	(0.024)	(0.023)	(0.047)	(0.01)	(0.012)
Unhyphenated	0.682***	-0.633***	1.314***	0.222***	0.115***
Ancestry	(0.033)	(0.032)	(0.064)	(0.013)	(0.017)
English	0.418***	-0.682***	1.100***	-0.441***	-0.563***
Ancestry	(0.054)	(0.052)	(0.104)	(0.022)	(0.027)
Irish	0.936***	-0.787***	1.723***	0.432***	0.389***
Ancestry	(0.070)	(0.068)	(0.138)	(0.028)	(0.036)
Italian	-1.310***	1.302***	-2.612***	-0.324***	-0.185***
Ancestry	(0.081)	(0.078)	(0.157)	(0.033)	(0.041)

American	8.731***	-5.122***	13.85***	-1.444***	-0.230*
South Dummy	(0.655)	(0.631)	(1.280)	(0.264)	(0.332)
Constant	31.31***	61.80***	-30.49***	0.620	1.176*
	(1.044)	(1.006)	(2.040)	(0.421)	(0.529)
N	3112	3112	3112	3112	3112
adj. R^2	0.378	0.383	0.380	0.258	0.142

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 9: Replication of the regression Models 6, 8 and 9 with total instead of single ancestry

	(6)	(8)	(9)
	Democratic to Republican Swing State (2012 to 2016)	McCain/ Palin (Republican)	Dem. 2008 - Dem. 2004
German Ancestry	**0.059*****	**0.360*****	**0.032*****
	(0.006)	(0.020)	(0.008)
Unhyphenated Ancestry	0.011	0.384***	-0.127***
	(0.010)	(0.030)	(0.012)
English Ancestry	-0.032	0.699***	0.0698***
	(0.017)	(0.045)	(0.018)
Irish Ancestry	0.007	0.511***	-0.394***

	(0.018)	(0.058)	(0.022)
Italian Ancestry	0.132***	-0.807***	0.222***
	(0.017)	(0.07)	(0.027)
American South Dummy	-0.448*	11.81***	-3.311***
	(0.185)	(0.617)	(0.239)
Constant	-3.358***	28.39***	8.168***
	(0.300)	(1.007)	(0.391)
N	3112	3113	3113
adj. R^2		0.317	0.289

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 10: Replication of the regression model 10 with total instead of single ancestry

	(10)
	Ross Perot (1992)
German Ancestry 1992	**0.127***
	(0.008)
American Unhyphenated 1992	-0.204***
	(0.017)
English Ancestry 1992	0.270***
	(0.014)
Irish Ancestry 1992	0.114***

	(0.02)
Italian Ancestry 1992	-0.130***
	(0.029)
American South Dummy	-2.850***
	(0.278)
Constant	13.97***
	(0.472)
N	3111
adj. R^2	0.499

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 11: Replication of the regression models 11 and 12 with total instead of single ancestry

	(11)	(12)
	Ferguson (1920: American Party)	La Follette (1924: Progressive Party)
German Ancestry 1980	**0.749*****	**0.616*****
	(0.083)	(0.053)
Unhyphenated Ancestry 1980	0.256	0.139
	(0.156)	(0.102)
English Ancestry 1980	-0.009	0.015
	(0.149)	(0.089)
Irish Ancestry 1980	-0.375	-0.430***
	(0.203)	(0.118)
Italian Ancestry 1980	0.241	-0.256

	(1.208)	(0.790)
Constant	2.007	3.252[*]
	(2.338)	(1.505)
N	246	253
adj. R^2	0.265	0.379
German Ancestry 2016	**0.798[***]**	**0.710[***]**
	(0.119)	(0.085)
Unhyphenated Ancestry 2016	-0.008	-0.025
	(0.155)	(0.109)
English Ancestry 2016	0.255	-0.018
	(0.251)	(0.178)
Irish Ancestry 2016	-0.500	-0.697[***]
	(0.270)	(0.187)
Italian Ancestry 2016	0.679[**]	0.211
	(0.212)	(0.151)
Constant	-0.142	3.448[**]
	(1.814)	(1.262)
N	246	253
adj. R^2	0.250	0.257

Standard errors in parentheses
[*] $p < 0.05$, [**] $p < 0.01$, [***] $p < 0.001$