

# Henry Ford and Antisemitism

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## Abstract

Henry Ford used his nationwide dealership network to distribute *The Dearborn Independent*, a newspaper in which he published antisemitic propaganda from 1920 to 1927. We reconstruct the complete Ford dealership network in 1917 to 1918 and construct a novel measure of local antisemitism from classified job and housing advertisements mentioning “Gentiles only” or “Gentiles preferred,” covering 376 newspapers and 69,284 discriminatory advertisements for the period 1910 to 1941. Exploiting the interaction of preexisting dealer density with the timing of Ford’s antisemitic campaign, and instrumenting with automobile market concentration among nonFord brands, we show that counties with more Ford dealerships experienced significantly more antiJewish classified advertisements during and after the active period of the campaign. The effects were immediate, persisted for nearly two decades after the paper’s closure, and are corroborated by cross sectional evidence on the establishment of German American Bund branches and Ku Klux Klan klaverns. Business elites can shape social attitudes over the long term using their commercial networks as instruments of ideological diffusion, at business expense.

## I. Introduction

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A great deal is known about the ways in which wealthy businesspeople use their economic position to shape public policy for material ends. The tools they deploy are familiar: lobbying and bribing politicians *ex post*, financing electoral campaigns *ex ante*, cultivating political connections, and controlling media outlets. Less well understood is a related but conceptually distinct phenomenon, the use of business power not to extract policy rents, but to propagate political and ideological convictions at the expense of business performance. Modern examples abound. Elon Musk’s acquisition of X (formerly Twitter) to promote a particular brand of populism, George Soros’s funding of the Open Society Foundations, and the Koch brothers’ endowment of the Cato Institute all illustrate how businesspeople leverage their reputations, wealth, and networks to reshape the ideological landscape. Yet the causal effects of such campaigns on mass attitudes remain poorly documented.

This paper studies these questions in the context of one of the most consequential and well documented cases of ideology driven media control in American history: Henry Ford’s antisemitic campaign of the 1920s and early 1930s. Ford is widely regarded as among the most celebrated entrepreneurs in American history, founder of the Ford Motor Company, pioneer of the moving assembly line, and architect of the nationwide automobile dealership. It is less commonly appreciated that he was also a fierce antisemite, and that he mobilized the full reach of his business empire to disseminate that hatred. In 1919, Ford purchased a local weekly newspaper, *The*

*Dearborn Independent*, which he transformed into a vehicle for antiJewish propaganda from 1920 to 1927. Distribution was not incidental: Ford dealers across the country were required to carry the paper, subscriptions were bundled with car sales, and dealers organized contests to maximize circulation. At its peak, the paper reached nearly 700,000 readers per week, making it one of the most widely read publications in the United States.

The influence Ford’s campaign exerted was noted by contemporaries. Prominent lawyer Samuel Untermyer wrote in 1927 that wherever there was a Ford agency, the antisemitic publications were to be found, and that coupled with the magic name of Ford, they had done more than could be undone in a century to sow and ripen the seeds of racial hatred. Historians, drawing on anecdotal evidence, have argued that the *Dearborn Independent* shaped antisemitic discourse not only in the United States but abroad. Adolf Hitler identified Ford as his inspiration, and Baldur von Schirach, the leader of the Hitler Youth, testified at Nuremberg that Ford’s book *The International Jew* had turned him into an antisemite. Despite this historical notoriety, there has been no systematic empirical analysis of the effects of Ford’s campaign on American public opinion.

This paper provides the first such analysis. We make two main data contributions. First, we reconstruct the complete nationwide Ford dealership network in 1917 to 1918, using contract registers from the Henry Ford Archives. This allows us to measure, at the county level, the intensity of distribution of the *Dearborn Independent* prior to the onset of the antisemitic campaign, a key source of identifying variation. Second, we construct a novel, fine grained measure of local antisemitism for the period 1910 to 1941, derived from classified job and housing advertisements published in a large sample of local newspapers. Restrictive phrases such as “Gentiles only” and “Gentiles preferred” were common in employment and rental markets of the era and provide a quantifiable record of antiJewish discrimination that varies across counties and over time. We identify 69,284 such discriminatory advertisements across 376 newspapers and 11,300 pages of classified sections.

Our empirical strategy exploits the interaction of the preexisting Ford dealership density with time variation in the content of the *Dearborn Independent*, specifically the launch of the antisemitic campaign in May 1920, the intermittent second wave from 1924 to 1926, and the closure of the paper in 1927 following a libel lawsuit. The identifying assumption is that, conditional on county and year fixed effects, state by period fixed effects, and a rich set of preexisting county controls (including the total size of the local automobile market), the density of Ford dealerships was not correlated with preexisting trends in antisemitism. We confirm the absence of pretrends in event study regressions spanning the period 1910 to 1941. To address residual endogeneity concerns, we also instrument for Ford dealer density with the *Herfindahl Hirschman Index of market concentration* in the nonFord automobile market in 1918, exploiting the classic Bresnahan and Reiss prediction that Ford tended to expand more aggressively into markets with weaker competition.

The results are clear and robust. Counties with more Ford dealerships experienced a significant increase in antiJewish classified advertisements following the launch of the antisemitic campaign

in 1920. The effect was immediate, persistent across the active period of the newspaper, and attenuated but did not disappear after the paper's closure in 1927, consistent with a lasting ideological legacy that outlived the original campaign. Our IV estimates are of similar magnitude to the OLS, ruling out simple positive selection as the main confound. In cross sectional analyses, Ford dealership density also predicts the subsequent presence of local branches of the German American Bund and of Ku Klux Klan klaverns, two organizations with pronounced antisemitic programs. Taken together, the evidence suggests that Ford succeeded in shifting antisemitic attitudes among ordinary Americans, with effects that persisted for nearly two decades.

Our paper contributes to several literatures. It adds to the growing body of work on the persuasion power of media to alter political and social attitudes (for surveys, see DellaVigna and Gentzkow 2010; DellaVigna and La Ferrara 2015; Enikolopov and Petrova 2015), and in particular to the strand that studies media as a vehicle for extreme right ideology (Yanagizawa Drott 2014; DellaVigna et al. 2014; Adena et al. 2015; Wang 2021). It also contributes to the economics of antisemitism (Voigtländer and Voth 2012; Becker and Pascali 2019; Grosfeld et al. 2019), and to the literature on the influence of business on politics (Fisman 2001; Faccio 2006; Goldman et al. 2009). More broadly, the paper makes the conceptual point, illustrated rather than assumed, that business elites can shape social attitudes over the long term without formal political engagement, using the business enterprise as a means of ideological diffusion rather than a vehicle for rent extraction. The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section II provides historical background on Ford and the *Dearborn Independent*. Section III describes the data. Section IV presents the empirical strategy and results. Section V extends the analysis to cross sectional outcomes. Section VI concludes.

## II. Historical Background

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### II.A. Henry Ford: Industrialist and Ideologue

Henry Ford (1863 to 1947) founded the Ford Motor Company in 1903. By the 1910s, the Model T had democratized automobile ownership: the moving assembly line, introduced in 1913, slashed production costs and made cars affordable to the American middle class. By the early 1920s, Ford Motor Company accounted for roughly half of all automobiles sold in the United States. The company also pioneered a nationwide network of independent dealerships, which served as local hubs for both sales and service and gave Ford an extraordinary organizational footprint across the country. Ford introduced the five dollar workday in 1914, reduced working hours from nine to eight, and was widely celebrated as a progressive employer. Because of his industrial achievements, his views carried credibility: the public regarded him as a serious and trustworthy figure, not simply as a polemicist.

Ford showed no recorded antisemitic views before World War I. During and immediately after the war, however, he came to blame Jewish bankers for the conflict and more generally came to see Jewish financiers as the hidden hand behind international affairs. After losing a U.S. Senate race

in Michigan in 1918, in part through press criticism, he widened his grievances to encompass the Jewish controlled press. In 1919, he purchased the *Dearborn Independent*, a small local weekly from Dearborn, Michigan, and in May 1920 launched an antisemitic campaign that would run, with interruptions, for seven years.

The first wave of articles, published over 91 consecutive weeks from May 1920 to 1922, was subsequently compiled into a four volume set titled *The International Jew: The World's Foremost Problem*, distributed with Ford's name as author and translated into multiple languages. The articles drew heavily on the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a fabricated conspiratorial text of Russian imperial provenance, presenting it as factual evidence of a Jewish plot for world domination. When *The Times of London* debunked the Protocols as a near verbatim plagiarism of an 1864 French political satire, Ford was unmoved. His published response was characteristically blunt: the only statement he cared to make about the *Protocols* was that they fit in with what was going on. The first wave of articles ended in 1922 following public criticism, calls for a boycott of Ford cars by Jewish organizations, and a public statement signed by more than a hundred prominent Americans, including former Presidents Wilson, Taft, and Roosevelt, condemning the campaign. A second wave followed from 1924 to 1926, focusing on finance, communism, and moral decay in a somewhat more moderate register. The paper closed in 1927 after Ford settled the libel lawsuit brought by attorney Aaron Sapiro and issued a public apology disavowing the antisemitic content.

The distribution mechanism was central to the paper's reach. Ford dealers were required to carry the *Dearborn Independent*; subscriptions were bundled with car purchases and handed out in showrooms; dealers organized circulation contests, occasionally with an automobile as the prize. The paper described itself as "The Ford International Weekly" and "Chronicler of the Neglected Truth." By 1922 its circulation had reached 300,000; by 1924 it peaked at approximately 700,000, making it one of the most widely read newspapers in the country. The KKK later circulated *The International Jew* through its own network. The organizational logic of the Ford dealership network thus provided an unprecedented infrastructure for the dissemination of extremist ideology to ordinary Americans in their local communities.

## III. Data

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### III.A. Ford Dealership Network

Our primary measure of the distribution of the *Dearborn Independent* is the number of Ford dealerships in a county in 1917 to 1918, reconstructed from contract registers held in the Henry Ford Archives. These registers record dealerships by city and town, with information on dealer names and branch assignments. In 1918, there were 15,791 Ford dealerships across the United States, a dense national grid that predates the antisemitic campaign by two years and is therefore immune to reverse causality. We aggregate these to the county level. The average county in our sample had approximately 5.9 Ford dealerships, ranging from zero to 118. Figure 1 maps the

geographic distribution of Ford dealerships by town, and Figure 2 aggregates this to the county level. Dealer density is high throughout the East and Midwest, with sparser coverage in the Mountain West and Southwest, a pattern driven by population density and proximity to the road network rather than by any preexisting variation in local attitudes.

**Figure 1. Geographic Diffusion of Ford Dealerships by Town, 1917/1918**

Geographic Diffusion of Ford dealerships

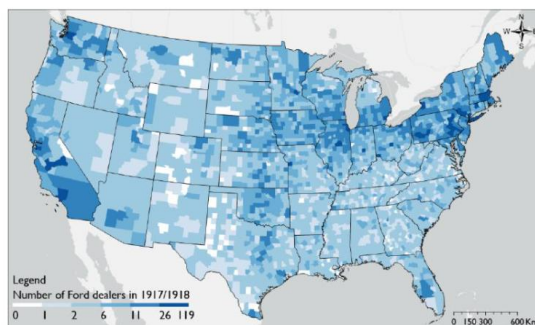


**Notes.** The map shows the existence of a Ford dealer by town in 1917/1918.

*Notes.* The map shows the existence of a Ford dealer by town in 1917/1918. Stars indicate Ford assembly plants in 1920. Source: Henry Ford Archives contract registers.

**Figure 2. Geographic Diffusion of Ford Dealerships by County, 1917/1918**

Geographic Diffusion of Ford dealerships by county



**Notes.** The map shows the number of Ford dealers per county in 1917/1918.

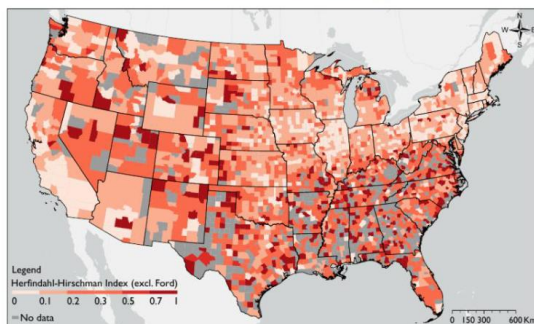
*Notes.* The map shows the number of Ford dealers per county in 1917/1918. Source: Henry Ford Archives contract registers.

To instrument for Ford dealer density, we use data on competing automobile brands from the 1918 Chilton Trade List, an industry directory that recorded dealerships for all major manufacturers. We compute the *Herfindahl Hirschman Index of market concentration* in the nonFord automobile market at the county level. In concentrated markets, where competition among nonFord brands was weak, Ford tended to expand more aggressively, consistent with the classic prediction of Bresnahan and Reiss (1991). Figure 3 maps the geographic distribution of this instrument. Crucially, as shown in the descriptive statistics, this concentration measure is uncorrelated with the full set of preexisting county characteristics, Jewish population share, German born share, first generation migrant share, Democratic vote share in 1916, literacy, occupational structure, income,

and infrastructure density, after conditioning on the total size of the local automobile market. This orthogonality supports its use as an instrument.

**Figure 3. Distribution of Market Concentration Excluding Ford (Instrument), 1918**

Distribution of Market Concentration excluding Ford



**Notes.** The map shows the distribution of the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index of market concentration computed excluding Ford dealerships. Grey areas have no data.

*Notes.* The map shows the distribution of the Herfindahl Hirschman Index of market concentration computed excluding Ford dealerships. Grey areas have no data. Source: Chilton Trade List, 1918.

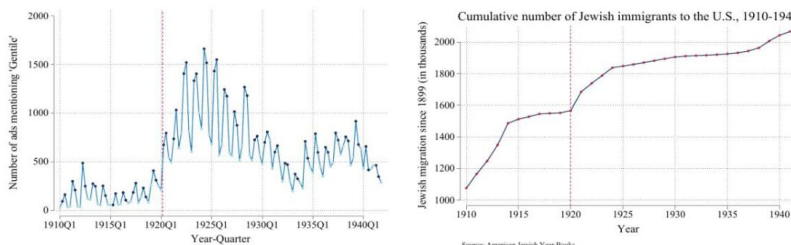
### III.B. Antisemitism in Classified Advertisements

Our outcome variable is the count of classified newspaper advertisements mentioning the word “Gentile,” in variants including “Gentiles only” and “Gentiles preferred.” These phrases appeared routinely in employment and housing advertisements in the early twentieth century, before such practices were rendered illegal by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Fair Housing Act of 1968. We searched the *Newspapers.com* archive, covering 376 newspapers across 11,300 pages of classified sections, for the period 1910 to 1941, and identified 69,284 antiJewish discriminatory advertisements. Figure 4 plots the aggregate count of such advertisements by quarter over the sample period. The series is low and stable before 1920, jumps sharply with the launch of the *Dearborn Independent* campaign, peaks in the mid 1920s, and falls but remains elevated following the paper’s 1927 closure. Table 1 reports descriptive statistics for all variables used in the analysis.

**Figure 4. Anti Jewish Classified Advertisements Over Time, 1910 to 1941**

Anti-Jewish classified ads over time

Figure: # Classified ads mentioning “Gentile” and Jewish immigration to the U.S.



**Notes.** Dark navy points represents 3rd and 4th quarters, while light blue points represent 1st and 2nd quarters.

Notes. Left panel: quarterly count of classified advertisements mentioning “Gentile” across all newspapers in the sample. Right panel: cumulative Jewish immigration to the United States, 1910 to 1941. The red dashed line marks the start of Ford’s antisemitic campaign in 1920. Source: Newspapers.com; American Jewish Year Books.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics**

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics**

### Descriptives

	Mean	Min	Max	N
Number of ads mentioning ‘Gentile’	0.8	0.0	1034.0	79,456
Number of Ford dealers	5.9	0.0	118.0	2,465
Number of Ford dealers, Chilton	2.8	0.0	48.0	2,483
Market concentration, excluding Ford	0.3	0.04	1.0	2,483
(log) Population in 1920	9.9	6.2	14.9	2,465
(log) Distance to Dearborn, MI	6.9	2.3	8.1	2,483
County hosts top 100 city	0.0	0.0	1.0	2,483
Urbanization Rate in 1920	22.9	0.0	100.0	2,483
Log total number of dealers, Chilton	2.3	0.0	6.0	2,483
Share Jewish Population in 1920	0.0	0.0	0.3	2,483
Share German Born in 1920	1.2	0.0	10.8	2,483
Share of First Generation migrants in 1920	8.0	0.0	54.0	2,482
Share Literate in 1920	95.6	67.1	100.0	2,483
Occupational income score in 1920	19.0	12.2	28.4	2,481
Share of agriculture in 1920	47.2	1.3	90.6	2,481
Share of manufacturing in 1920	12.2	0.1	74.4	2,481
Share of retail/wholesale trade in 1920	7.5	0.2	27.1	2,481
Share Democrat in 1916	56.0	16.7	100.0	2,474

Notes. Additional controls: Railroad per sqkm. Total length of all roads per sqkm. Log distance to highways and roads.

Notes. Sample covers approximately 2,465 to 2,483 counties across 32 years (1910 to 1941). Anti Jewish classified ads are identified from the Newspapers.com archive using the phrases “Gentile,” “Gentiles only,” and “Gentiles preferred.” Source: Henry Ford Archives; Chilton Trade List; Newspapers.com; US Census 1920.

## IV. Empirical Strategy and Results

### IV.A. Event Study Framework

We estimate a panel event study model in which the outcome is the number of antiJewish classified advertisements in county  $c$  in year  $t$ , and the treatment variable is the number of Ford dealerships in county  $c$  in 1917 to 1918 interacted with year fixed effects. The identifying assumption is that, absent Ford’s antisemitic campaign, counties with more Ford dealerships would have followed parallel trends in antisemitic advertising relative to counties with fewer dealerships. All specifications include county fixed effects, year fixed effects, and state by period fixed effects, where the periods are defined to encompass the distinct phases of the campaign. The baseline set of controls includes county population and urbanization (1920), an indicator for top 100 cities, Jewish population share (1920), and indicators for the presence of classified advertisements, all interacted with year fixed effects. An extended set adds demographic, economic, and infrastructure controls. Standard errors are clustered at the county level throughout.

### IV.B. Main Results

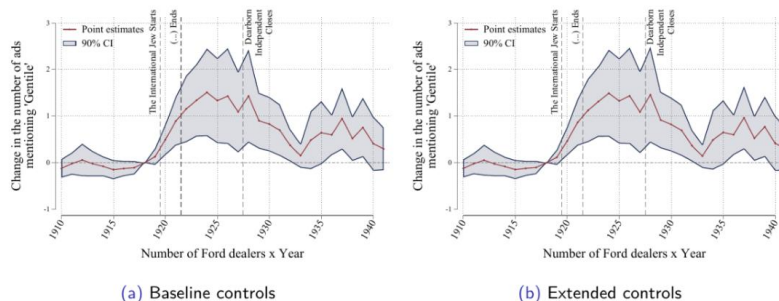
The event study coefficients are plotted in Figure 5. Two features are worth emphasizing. First, there are no pretrends: coefficients for the years 1910 through 1918, the eight years before Ford purchased the *Dearborn Independent*, are small, statistically indistinguishable from zero, and exhibit no systematic pattern. This is consistent with the identifying assumption that Ford dealership density was not positively correlated with preexisting antisemitic trends, conditional on controls. Second, the coefficients turn sharply positive beginning in 1920, coinciding precisely

with the launch of the antisemitic campaign in May of that year. The effect peaks in the mid 1920s, declines after 1927 when the paper closed, but remains positive and statistically significant through the end of our sample in 1941.

**Figure 5. Event Study Estimates: Effect of Ford Dealerships on Anti Jewish Classified Advertisements (OLS)**

Yearly OLS estimates

Figure: # Classified ads mentioning "Gentile"



Notes. The figure plots the yearly OLS coefficient estimates on the interaction of Ford dealer count with year indicator variables, relative to 1918 (the omitted year). Panel (a) uses baseline controls; panel (b) uses extended controls. The shaded area is the 90% confidence interval. Vertical dashed lines mark the start of the antisemitic campaign (1920), the end of the first wave (1922), and the closure of the *Dearborn Independent* (1927). Standard errors clustered at the county level.

Table 2 presents the main average treatment effect estimates across OLS, reduced form, and 2SLS specifications. OLS specifications show that each additional Ford dealership in a county is associated with approximately 1.2 additional antiJewish advertisements per year during the active period of the *Dearborn Independent* (columns 1 to 4). The post closure effect is approximately 0.7, roughly half the active period effect, suggesting persistent but attenuating influence. The IV specification, instrumenting with automobile market concentration, yields estimates of approximately 1.0 during the active period and 0.6 post closure (columns 7 to 8). First stage F statistics are 14.2 and 14.4, above the conventional weak instrument threshold. The reduced form (columns 5 to 6) confirms a significant relationship between market concentration, the instrument, and the antisemitic advertising outcome. Figure 6 plots the reduced form event study coefficients, which mirror the OLS pattern in timing and persistence.

**Table 2. Effect of Ford Dealerships on Anti Jewish Classified Advertisements**

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Table: Effect of Ford Dealerships on Antisemitic Ads

	Number of classified ads mentioning 'Gentile'							
	OLS				Reduced Form		2SLS	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Number of Ford dealers × Dearborn Independent Active	1.121*** (0.361)	1.284*** (0.422)	1.196*** (0.439)	1.181*** (0.434)			1.004* (0.540)	1.044* (0.533)
Number of Ford dealers × After Dearborn Independent Closed	0.595*** (0.215)	0.694*** (0.255)	0.688** (0.277)	0.694** (0.281)			0.600** (0.275)	0.576** (0.270)
Market concentration, excluding Ford × Dearborn Independent Active					3.441* (1.978)	3.600* (1.956)		
Market concentration, excluding Ford × After Dearborn Independent Closed					2.054** (0.999)	1.984** (0.986)		
R-squared	0.553	0.559	0.618	0.622	0.608	0.613	0.178	0.187
Observations	78,528	78,528	78,528	78,528	78,528	78,528	78,528	78,528
Year and County FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
State × Period FEs		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Baseline Controls × Year FEs			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Extended Controls × Year FEs				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Average outcome, Before the International Jew Campaign	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25
Average outcome, the Dearborn Independent is Active	1.51	1.51	1.51	1.51	1.51	1.51	1.51	1.51
Average outcome, After the Dearborn Independent Closed	0.91	0.91	0.91	0.91	0.91	0.91	0.91	0.91
First-stage F-stat							14.2	14.4

Notes. Dependent variable: number of classified advertisements mentioning "Gentile" in county *c* in year *t*. All specifications include county fixed effects, year fixed effects, and state-by-period fixed effects. Baseline controls include log population (1920), urbanization rate (1920), top-100 city indicator, Jewish population share (1920), and classified advertisement presence indicator, all interacted with year fixed effects. Extended controls additionally include demographic, economic, and infrastructure characteristics. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the county level. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

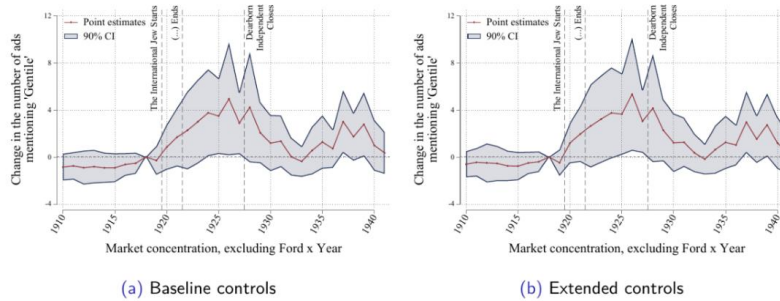
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**Figure 6. Event Study Estimates: Reduced Form (Market Concentration Excluding Ford)**

Figure 6. Event-Study Estimates: Reduced Form (Market Concentration Excluding Ford)

Reduced Form

Figure: RF: Market concentration in the car market, excluding Ford



Notes. The figure plots the yearly reduced-form coefficient estimates on the interaction of the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index of market concentration (excluding Ford) with year indicator variables, relative to 1918. Panel (a) uses baseline controls; panel (b) uses extended controls. The shaded area is the 90% confidence interval. Standard errors clustered at the county level.

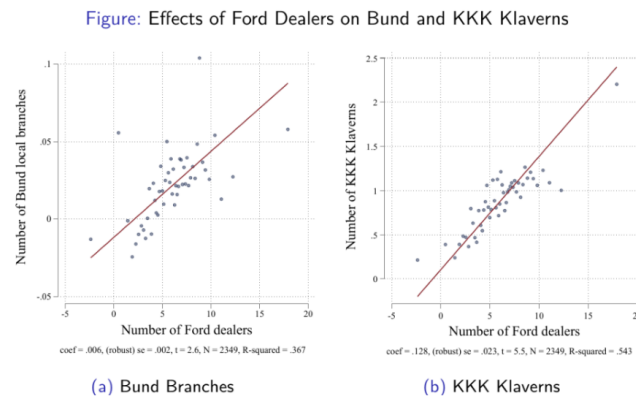
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## V. Cross Sectional Evidence: Bund and KKK

Beyond the panel evidence on classified advertisements, we examine whether Ford dealership density is associated with two cross sectional outcomes that capture the organizational infrastructure of far right, antisemitic mobilization: the number of local branches of the German American Bund in 1940, a pro Nazi organization that organized rallies, youth camps, and propaganda activities during the late 1930s; and the number of Ku Klux Klan klaverns established in a county between 1920 and 1939, which peaked around 1925 and promoted a platform of white Protestant nationalism explicitly hostile to Jews and Catholics. Both organizations had pronounced antisemitic programs. The KKK actively distributed *The International Jew* through its own network in subsequent decades, and Figure 7 shows clearly positive slopes between Ford dealer density and both outcomes in the raw binscatter.

**Figure 7. Effects of Ford Dealerships on Bund Branches and KKK Klaverns (Binscatter)**

Binscatter plots



Notes. Binscatter plots of the number of German American Bund local branches (left panel) and KKK klaverns (right panel) against the number of Ford dealerships, conditional on state fixed effects and baseline controls. The slope coefficients and standard errors are reported below each panel.

Table 3 presents OLS, reduced form, and IV estimates of the effect of Ford dealer density on Bund branches. In the OLS, each additional Ford dealership is associated with approximately 0.006 additional Bund branches, a small effect in absolute terms but economically meaningful given the rarity of the outcome (average of 0.022 Bund branches per county). The 2SLS estimate is approximately twice as large (0.012 to 0.013), consistent with attenuation bias from measurement error. Table 4 presents the corresponding estimates for KKK klaverns. Each Ford dealer is associated with 0.13 additional klaverns in OLS and 0.14 to 0.15 in 2SLS. These are large effects relative to the sample mean of 0.88 klaverns per county. First stage F statistics for the cross-sectional specifications exceed 25. These cross-sectional results must be interpreted with care, but the IV strategy conditions on total automobile market size and a rich set of controls, and the Herfindahl instrument is orthogonal to the observable determinants of organizational activity.

**Table 3. Effect of Ford Dealerships on pro Nazi German American Bund Branches, 1940**

**Table 3. Effect of Ford Dealerships on pro-Nazi German-American Bund Branches, 1940**

Cross-Sectional Results: Bunds

Table: Effect of Ford Dealerships on pro-Nazi German-American Bunds in 1940

	Dependent variable: Number of Bund local branches					
	OLS		Reduced Form		2SLS	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Number of Ford dealers	0.006*** (0.002)	0.006** (0.002)			0.013** (0.005)	0.012** (0.005)
Market concentration, excluding Ford			0.047** (0.019)	0.044** (0.019)		
Coughlin signal, 1936 (standardized)	0.010 (0.009)	0.015 (0.012)	0.009 (0.010)	0.013 (0.012)	0.010 (0.010)	0.015 (0.012)
Coughlin signal in free space, 1936 (standardized)	0.020 (0.012)	0.024* (0.014)	0.023* (0.014)	0.028* (0.015)	0.016 (0.011)	0.021* (0.012)
R-squared	0.344	0.368	0.325	0.354	0.256	0.286
Observations	2,349	2,349	2,349	2,349	2,349	2,349
State FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Baseline Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Extended Controls		✓		✓		✓
Average outcome	0.022	0.022	0.022	0.022	0.022	0.022
First-stage F-stat					25.0	25.5

Notes. Dependent variable: number of German American Bund local branches per county in 1940. The instrument in 2SLS columns is the Herfindahl Hirschman Index of market concentration in the nonFord automobile market in 1918. All specifications include state fixed effects and baseline controls. Standard errors clustered at the state level. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

**Table 4. Effect of Ford Dealerships on KKK Activity**

FMS- Séminaire des Boursiers 2026

Cross-Sectional Results: Ku Klux Klan

Table: Effect of Ford Dealerships on KKK Activity

	Dependent variable: Number of KKK Klaverns					
	OLS		Reduced Form		2SLS	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Number of Ford dealers	0.131*** (0.024)	0.128*** (0.023)			0.144*** (0.049)	0.150*** (0.049)
Market concentration, excluding Ford			0.539** (0.227)	0.566** (0.233)		
Log # Black population in 1920	0.045* (0.024)	0.061** (0.026)	0.030 (0.023)	0.057** (0.025)	0.046* (0.024)	0.061** (0.026)
R-squared	0.535	0.544	0.459	0.474	0.478	0.486
Observations	2,349	2,349	2,349	2,349	2,349	2,349
State FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Baseline Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Extended Controls		✓		✓		✓
Average outcome	0.876	0.876	0.876	0.876	0.876	0.876
First-stage F-stat					25.0	25.5

Notes. Dependent variable: number of KKK klaverns established in a county between 1920 and 1939. The instrument in 2SLS columns is the Herfindahl Hirschman Index of market concentration in the nonFord automobile market in 1918. All specifications include state fixed effects and baseline controls. Standard errors clustered at the state level. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

## VI. Conclusion

This paper provides the first systematic empirical evidence on the effects of Henry Ford’s antisemitic campaign on American public opinion. Using a novel panel dataset of antiJewish classified advertisements as a measure of local antisemitism, and exploiting the preexisting geographic density of Ford dealerships as the mechanism through which the *Dearborn Independent* was distributed, we find that the campaign produced a significant and persistent increase in antiJewish discrimination in employment and housing markets. The effects were immediate, arising precisely when the campaign launched in 1920, and outlasted the newspaper

itself by more than a decade. IV estimates based on automobile market concentration corroborate the OLS findings. In cross section, Ford dealership density also predicts the subsequent establishment of Bund branches and KKK klaverns.

Several implications follow. First, the results demonstrate that media campaigns can shift social attitudes in durable ways, even when the medium is a newspaper rather than radio or television and the distribution is through a commercial rather than a state network. The persuasion technology that Ford deployed, bundling ideology with commerce, exploiting a trusted brand, saturating local markets through a preexisting franchise network, was highly effective precisely because it was embedded in everyday economic life rather than confined to explicitly political channels. Second, the evidence speaks to the credibility premium that accrued to Ford's views by virtue of his industrial celebrity. Ford was not merely a rich man with a newspaper; he was a figure of national admiration whose manufacturing genius lent authority to his social commentary. Third, the results have implications for how we think about the political economy of business elites. The standard model, businesspeople seeking to influence policy for material gain, misses cases like Ford's, where the motive is ideological and the instrument is the business enterprise itself. Ford's campaign cost him business: Jewish boycotts hurt sales, and the libel settlement was costly. Yet he continued for seven years. The lesson, relevant to contemporary debates about billionaire media ownership, is that business power can be mobilized for ideological purposes at business expense, and that the resulting effects on social attitudes can be large and long lasting.

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