

Bodies and Borders: Reproductive Nationalism from the 1920s to the 2020s

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Abstract

In 2025, the United States subsidized births to citizens while mounting one of its most aggressive deportation campaigns in decades. A century earlier, the Congress that wrote the national-origins quotas also presided over “race suicide” anxiety and a eugenic sterilization movement. Why do governments promote births and restrict immigration when the two are treated as substitutes? We argue that both policies apply a single membership criterion—resemblance to the nation’s ancestral core—to birth and admission. Using 1920s quota schedules, roll-call votes, and census data, together with the 2025 entry proclamation, congressional sponsorship, benefit incidence, and surveys, we show that 1920s quotas penalized origins distant from the Anglo-American population and, among them, those with higher fertility. In the 2020s, entry restrictions fall hardest on Muslim-majority states, and natal benefits are reserved for citizen children. Only this membership-conditioned natalism is associated with restriction. A century apart, one standard governs membership at the border and the womb.

I. Introduction

In 2025, the American presidential administration approved a thousand-dollar account for every newborn citizen, endorsed a baby bonus for new mothers, and proposed a medal for women who bear six or more children. At the same time, that administration mounted one

of the most aggressive anti-immigration programs in the last hundred years, implementing deportation campaigns, largely closing the southern border, and suspending or limiting visa entry from nineteen countries, most of them Muslim-majority or African states (P.L. 119-21, 2025; Executive Order 14160, 2025; Proclamation 10949, 2025). These two policy packages did not arise in isolation: they were driven by activists and politicians who insisted that a nation defined by descent was failing to reproduce itself and was being demographically displaced from within and without. A century earlier, the same Congress that wrote the national-origins quota system—the law that choked off immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe as well as Asia—also presided over a panic about declining old-stock fertility and a eugenic sterilization movement aimed at the reproduction of the “unfit.”

We argue that although these episodes are separated by 100 years, they are expressions of the same phenomenon. The politics of the 2020s repeat the politics of the 1920s because both express a desire to manage national membership both within and at the nation’s border. This combination of policy outlooks is not uniquely American; a similar configuration recurs across the contemporary Global North. Hungary’s government explicitly framed its lifetime income-tax exemptions and massive housing subsidies for mothers of multiple children as a deliberate alternative to mass immigration (Melegh 2016). Italy’s government has similarly distributed birth bonuses strictly reserved for citizens and long-term residents, often justified by state ministers warning of “ethnic replacement” (Indelicato and Magalhães Lopes 2024). In structurally varied settings, the pattern holds: Israel provides unlimited, state-subsidized in vitro fertilization (IVF) to its citizens while using the Law of Return to admit co-ethnics and exclude others (Birenbaum-Carmeli 2016; Shachar 2009); Russia pairs expansive maternity benefits with the mass naturalization and passportization of claimed co-ethnics beyond its borders (Knott 2022).

This pairing is a puzzle for the standard technocratic view of population policy. Demographers and economists treat births and immigration as substitutes: when fertility falls below replacement, admission can fill the gap, so countries that struggle to raise their birth rates

should be especially open to immigration (United Nations Population Division 2001). The coalitions driving contemporary policy do the opposite. They subsidize births and restrict entry at the same time, at times in the same statute. What explains the recurrence of this pairing, a century apart?

A natural explanation is ethnic nationalism: a nation defined by descent will police its borders, and a pro-birth politics will accompany that project. Yet two recurring patterns are difficult to reconcile with that account alone. First, pro-birth politics does not move with restriction as a single bloc. Support for encouraging births often extends to all parents, regardless of immigration status; only when natal benefits are limited to citizens or other established members do they consistently appear together with restrictionist immigration agendas. Second, immigration policy restrictions have not varied solely by origin. At times it has also responded to differences in how rapidly immigrant communities were growing through births, so that border policy operated partly as fertility policy. A theory focused only on the border predicts neither pattern. Both become intelligible once membership is understood as managed at the two channels through which a nation acquires new members—birth and admission.

These patterns point to a single membership criterion applied across both dimensions. We call the underlying disposition that generates them reproductive nationalism: the view that the nation is a community of descent that must reproduce itself in kind. Coalitions that hold this view manage the composition of the next generation by favoring births and entrants who resemble the ancestral core and discouraging the rest. The object of this politics is not the size of the population; it is the composition of the people who come next. Scholars have often read the pairing as a causal chain—pro-birth policy leading to closed borders, or closed borders creating compensatory pro-birth policy (Melegh 2016; Perry et al. 2022; Indelicato and Magalhães Lopes 2024). We argue instead that neither policy produces the other. The two are joint expressions of one outlook, applied simultaneously to the womb and the border.

Political science has largely studied the two halves of this politics in separate literatures. Immigration scholarship explains restriction through labor-market competition, cultural backlash, and immigrant political voice (Goldin 1994; Tabellini 2020; Biavaschi and Facchini 2020). Citizenship scholarship maps how states define membership at law (Brubaker 1992; Joppke 2005; Vink and Bauböck 2013). Family-policy scholarship accounts for pronatalism through fiscal pressure, population aging, and gender politics (Teitelbaum and Winter 1985; Gauthier 1996; McDonald 2000). Scholars of nationalism, for their part, have paid little attention to the reproductive half of the pairing, even though the womb, not the border, generally supplies most of a nation’s new members. The gender-and-nation tradition views the connection—nations reproduce through women’s bodies, and states value some births above others (Colen 1995; Yuval-Davis 1997)—but establishes it interpretively rather than testing it.

Our contribution is to derive reproductive nationalism as a joint, testable claim and to examine it empirically. Focusing on two different epochs in America, we measure the membership criterion in the design of the laws themselves: quota formulas, benefit-eligibility rules, and entry-restriction lists. Evidence from the first era, 1900–1929, shows the criterion written into the design of admission law. The 1924 and 1929 quota schedules sorted admission by genetic distance from Britain. The penalty appears precisely when Congress backdated the quota base to the 1890 census—a within-origin design that holds an origin’s size, lobby, and distance constant. The same population base switch cut hardest at high-fertility origins, net of distance: border policy operated, in part, as fertility policy. Ancestry rather than religion was the operative criterion or membership marker.

The contemporary United States reproduces the same configuration under comparable membership markers, religion and citizenship status rather than ancestry. The 2025 entry restrictions fall disproportionately on Muslim-majority states. On the birth side, the natal benefits proposed in 2025 are restricted to citizen children; the incidence of those exclusions falls overwhelmingly on families of non-European origin. In Congress, only those natalist

bills that limit benefits to citizens are associated with restrictionist sponsorship; bills that extend benefits to all parents are not. The same split appears in individual attitudes: the belief that fewer children would be bad for the country predicts restrictionism, while holding a larger ideal family size does not. Within the same person over time, growing support for universal family benefits likewise leaves restrictionism unchanged. We test the configuration where the historical record is deepest and the rival explanations are sharpest: the United States of the 1920s and the 2020s.

The rest of the paper proceeds as follows. Section II develops the theoretical argument and derives the predictions that separate reproductive nationalism from ordinary nationalism, civilizationism, generic pronatalism, and welfare chauvinism. Section III presents the research design and the two cases; Section IV describes the data. Sections V and VI report the historical and contemporary results. Section VII places the findings against the rival accounts, and Section VIII concludes.

II. Reproductive Nationalism: A Theory of Membership Sorted by Resemblance

Every nation must renew itself across generations, not just in numbers but as a community with a defined identity. New members join in only two ways: through birth or through admission from outside (Anderson 1991; Shachar 2009). A long tradition of scholarship on gender and nationhood has shown that reproduction is deeply political because nations are reproduced through women’s bodies, and that societies value some births as essential to the nation’s future while treating others as a burden or threat (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989; Yuval-Davis 1997; Ginsburg and Rapp 1995; Stoler 2002; FitzGerald and Cook-Martín 2014). We extend this insight from the womb to the border: nations do not simply reproduce themselves, they sort both births and new arrivals according to how closely they resemble the existing population.

The conjunction of the two policies—support for some births, restriction of some entrants—is what we seek to explain. Ordinary nationalism already predicts origin-sorted admission and restriction that survives economic controls (Higham 1955; Brubaker 1992; King 2000; Tichenor 2002). If the evidence ended at the border, the concept developed here would simply relabel nativism. Our theoretical burden is to derive predictions that a theory of the border alone cannot make.

Most research examines immigration restriction and pronatalism separately. Immigration scholarship focuses on labor-market pressures, cultural backlash, and immigrant political voice (Goldin 1994; Tabellini 2020; Biavaschi and Facchini 2020); family-policy scholarship explains pronatalism through fiscal pressure, population aging, and gender politics (Teitelbaum and Winter 1985; Gauthier 1996; McDonald 2000). Neither literature treats the two as joint expressions of a single compositional logic. Classic pronatalist policies cared about numbers—Interwar France recruited foreign workers while promoting births; Romania’s Decree 770 banned abortion for all women regardless of origin (Cross 1983). Reproductive nationalism, by contrast, is concerned with composition: which births and which immigrants count as preserving the nation. When pronatalism and immigration restriction share that logic, they are not separate phenomena; they are joint products of one disposition.

The logic of sorting: two rationales

What is reproductive nationalism and how does it manifest in the polity? Theories of political psychology or those that focus on elite behavior describe the pattern but do not explain what specific form the resulting policies should take (Higham 1955; Kaufmann 2018; Norris and Inglehart 2019). We offer a simple decision-based explanation with two parts: a political-economic logic that explains why a governing coalition would sort new members, and a national-identity logic that explains why the sorting criterion must be one the public can accept as legitimate.

We begin by conceiving national citizenship as membership in a club (Buchanan 1965; Walzer 1983). The club is rivalrous in its rewards-political voice, fiscal redistribution, labor-market protection, and symbolic goods of belonging. New members enter in two ways: birth or admission. The governing coalition sets policy at both entry paths (Freeman 1995; Tichenor 2002).

Three strategies are available: close both paths, open both uniformly, or sort. Closing both is self-defeating; incumbents need new members to renew the workforce, the tax base, and the polity's demographic durability (Storesletten 2000). Opening both indiscriminately fails for a different reason. New members are not interchangeable bodies; they are voters and claimants whose presence can alter future coalitions. Even a purely strategic coalition therefore prefers entrants whose presence preserves, rather than dilutes, its hold on power (cf. Biavaschi and Facchini 2020).

The remaining strategy is selective sorting. The key question is the criterion. Economic models emphasize skill and productivity, but productivity alone does not predict political alliance. Resemblance to the existing population—in ancestry, language, religion, or culture—is a more reliable indicator (Luttmer 2001; Alesina and Glaeser 2004; Shayo 2009). The optimal policy therefore sorts new members by resemblance, above and beyond strictly economic considerations. The same logic operates on the womb: the future composition of the club is determined jointly by who is born and who is admitted, so a coalition that cares about composition must manage both entry paths (Weiner and Teitelbaum 2001; King 2000).

This yields two predictions that nativism does not make. First, a nativist state prices cultural or historical distance. A coalition managing composition must also price reproduction, because an admitted group's demographic weight equals its numbers multiplied by its fertility. Among origins at equal ancestral distance from the national core, the faster-reproducing group should face tighter restriction. Standard nativist accounts are silent on fertility; we

therefore expect immigration policy to penalize origin fertility even after accounting for distance; border policy operating, in part, as fertility policy.

Second, pro-birth policy should divide into two forms. Generic pronatalism encourages births wherever they occur (Teitelbaum and Winter 1985). A coalition concerned with the composition of the population cannot treat all births as equivalent. Membership-conditioned natal policies—benefits limited to the children of current members—belong to the same disposition as immigration restriction and should, we argue, appear with it. Universal natal policies—support for births regardless of parental origin—belong to a different politics and should not.

The contemporary United States illustrates the divide. The religious wing of the pro-birth coalition insists that every conception be carried to term regardless of parental origin. Because immigrant fertility exceeds native fertility, that universalist commitment works against compositional preservation. If pro-birth politics were simply nationalism, any natalist sponsorship should be associated with restriction. The argument here implies the opposite: only the membership-conditioned form should be associated with restrictionist immigration politics.

The national-identity logic The political-economic argument focuses on the governing coalition's interest in staying in power. A complementary argument focuses on the state as a shared identity. On this view, the nation is not simply a collection of material interests. It is a community defined by a particular ancestry, history, and set of cultural and religious commitments that the state is responsible for protecting and transmitting across generations (Anderson 1991; Smith 1986). Control over who belongs is not incidental, it is how the state exercises authority over the nation's future (Brubaker 1992; Torpey 2000; Zolberg 2006).

From this perspective, birth and immigration policies are the primary means by which national identity is preserved or challenged (Torpey 2000; Yuval-Davis 1997; Zolberg 2006). The state's task is to maintain the nation's distinct character across generations. It does

so by treating births and new arrivals differently. Supporting some births and admitting some immigrants enacts the claim that the nation has a specific identity worth preserving. Treating all births and all immigrants as interchangeable additions would imply that there is no meaningful difference between the nation and a mere collection of individuals (Walzer 1983).

This nationalism argument provides a condition absent from political economy accounts. For a policy to be understood as protecting the nation, the criterion employed to exclude non-citizens must be one that the public at the time accepts as a legitimate basis for belonging. Which criteria count as legitimate varies across time and place. When law or changing norms remove one criterion from the state's arsenal, politicians shift to the markers that remain publicly usable. The underlying preference for resemblance to the existing population reappears under the new criteria. This implication distinguishes our account from civilizationism, which interprets contemporary exclusion as a defense of Christian or Western civilizational identity (Brubaker 2017; Kaufmann 2018).

Both national-identity and political-economic logics point to the same conclusions. Governments will sort new members rather than treat them uniformly, and the sorting will rest on resemblance to the existing population rather than on skill or other economic factors alone. The same logic applies to both birth and immigration policy. The political-economic argument explains why a governing coalition has reason to sort; the national-identity argument explains why the sorting criterion must be one the public can openly accept. Together they locate the decision at the level of the national governing coalition.

This outlook operates across two channels and in two directions. The first channel is birth—deciding whose reproduction to encourage. The second is immigration—deciding whom to admit. In one direction, policy promotes the reproduction of favored groups; in the other, it limits or discourages the reproduction of disfavored groups. Combining these two channels and two directions yields four main policy instruments, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Policy instruments that sort membership by resemblance to the existing population

	<i>Promote favored reproduction</i>	<i>Limit disfavored reproduction</i>
Birth (who is born)	Membership-conditioned natalism: baby bonuses, motherhood honors, and tax or credit subsidies limited to favored mothers or citizen children	Coercive anti-natalism: eugenic sterilization, fertility-related penalties in the welfare code, racialized contraception politics
Admission (who is admitted)	Preference for co-ethnics or co-nationals: laws of return, <i>jus sanguinis</i> citizenship for the diaspora, origin-favoring quotas	Restriction and expulsion: origin-based exclusion, entry bans, deportation of non-members

The disposition examined here organizes membership at both channels—birth and admission—by sorting new members according to how closely they resemble the existing population.¹ The policy goal is not to increase total numbers. It is to shape composition: encouraging births among some women while discouraging or preventing births among others, and admitting some newcomers while excluding the rest. The top row of Table 1 illustrates this selective management across historical periods: the same governing coalitions that supported fertility for favored mothers often restricted it for disfavored women (Kline 2001; Roberts 1997).²

This framework yields two main claims, each with clear testable implications. First, governing coalitions care about the composition of future members, not simply their total number. Where this outlook shapes policy, governments sort both births and immigration according

¹Feminist scholarship on stratified reproduction argues that societies assign different value to women’s reproductive labor according to social position: some births are treated as essential to the nation’s future, others as a burden or threat (Colen (1995) and Ginsburg and Rapp (1995)). Yuval-Davis (1997) extended the insight to national membership, arguing that because nations reproduce themselves in part through women’s bodies, the state’s management of membership necessarily operates through control of reproduction.

²We focus on how these policies are designed. We do not measure their effects on women’s autonomy and bodily control—an important question that feminist demography and reproductive-justice scholarship have placed at the center of their work (Roberts 1997; Ross and Solinger 2017). That dimension lies outside the scope of this paper.

to resemblance to the existing population, beyond ordinary economic or security considerations. More precisely:

- **H1 (Compositional sorting at the border):** Immigration policy will favor groups closer to the national core even after accounting for skills or security concerns, and it will penalize higher origin fertility even after accounting for cultural or historical distance.
- **H2 (Selective association of natal and immigration policy):** Only membership-conditioned natal policies will appear together with immigration restriction—in the same coalitions, the same legislators, and at times the same statutes. Universal natal policies will not.

The second claim is that this sorting reflects a national commitment rather than a local reaction:

- **H3 (National rather than local):** The demographic-threat channel should not vary with local exposure. Districts facing the widest native–foreign fertility gaps should be no more restrictionist than others, and the disposition should predict restrictionism even after accounting for beliefs about labor-market competition.
- **H4 (Joint rather than sequential):** The two policies arise together; one is not a prerequisite for the other.

Together, H1–H4 test a common-cause model. The disposition we identify is a single latent outlook that generates both membership-conditioned natalism and immigration restriction as joint expressions of the same criterion, applied simultaneously to the two available channels.

III. Research Design

We test these hypotheses across two periods in American Politics. The second Trump administration provides the contemporary case. That government returned to office on an

immigration platform built around exclusion: the entry-restriction proclamation covered nationals of nineteen countries, most of them Muslim-majority or African states with substantial Muslim populations (Proclamation 10949, June 2025). An executive order sought to deny birthright citizenship to United States-born children whose parents are unlawfully or only temporarily present, so that parental status would determine which births counted as members of the nation (Executive Order 14160, January 2025). The signature tax program enacted a \$1,000 savings account for every newborn United States citizen and a child tax credit conditioned on the parents' citizenship status (P.L. 119-21, 2025). These were not presented as separate initiatives (Heritage Foundation 2023). The same officials who announced the immigration crackdown promoted the pro-birth agenda, and the same activists who made the demographic case for one made it for the other (Murphy 2024; Salter 2024).

A similar configuration shaped American politics a century earlier, in a more explicit form. Between 1900 and 1929, three campaigns operated in close coordination: one to raise births among native-born white Americans ("old stock"), one to prevent births among those judged unfit to reproduce the nation, and one to restrict immigration from groups judged incompatible with the nation's character (Tichenor 2002). Political leaders treated these as parts of a single project, even though historians today often discuss them separately (Ladd-Taylor 2017). The pro-birth campaign answered "race suicide," the term Theodore Roosevelt popularized in 1903 and 1905, with a targeted appeal to the "right" mothers rather than a general call for children (Lovett 2007). The eugenics movement produced compulsory sterilization statutes in thirty-two states, upheld in *Buck v. Bell* (1927) and applied unevenly across groups (Kevles 1985; Reilly 1991; Lombardo 2008; Stern 2016). Membership also passed through women's bodies directly: the Expatriation Act of 1907 stripped citizenship from American women who married foreigners, a rule the 1922 Cable Act retained for women who married Asian men (Bredbenner 1998; Cott 1998).

The restriction campaign produced the 1921 Emergency Quota Act, the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act, and the 1929 National Origins Formula—three successive laws that ratcheted down

admissions and sorted entrants by national origin, severely restricting Southern and Eastern Europe, barring Asia outright, and reserving the bulk of admissions for Northern and Western Europe (Higham 1955; King 2000; Ngai 2004). Importantly, the sorting standard during this era was stated openly, in biological and racial terms: the 1924 quotas treated national origin as racial ancestry, and the 1929 formula tied each country’s quota directly to its share of the ancestry of the 1920 United States population (Jacobson 1998; Ngai 2004).

The contemporary case operates under different constraints. After the Holocaust and the civil rights settlement of the 1960s, it is more problematic for policymakers to use race or descent as a criterion for admission or benefits; religion and citizenship status remain usable. Today’s entry restrictions accordingly name Muslim-majority countries and security criteria, and natal policy sorts by citizenship status rather than ancestry. The underlying standard, we argue, is the same; the visible criteria have changed. This claim about membership markers is testable. For the 1920s, we measure resemblance with genetic distance from Britain, the era’s own “stock” standard (Spolaore and Wacziarg 2009, 2013), and we test robustness by looking at origin religious composition. For the 2020s, we identify religion directly from the policy itself and examine how far the proclamation’s stated security criteria can account for the list of included countries.

A word on what the two-case comparison can and cannot show. Both eras are episodes in which coalitions committed to this membership criterion held power. The design therefore tests whether one criterion organizes policy at both channels within such episodes—under different markers, and in the settings where rival explanations are strongest. It does not test whether the presence or absence of the disposition explains variation across periods. The conclusion treats the quiet decades between the two cases as scope conditions of the claim, not as part of its evidence.

Because each era leaves different records, the same prediction requires different tests. The 1920s provide statutory quota schedules, county- and state-level census aggregates, and the

full sequence of restriction roll calls. The 2020s provide statutory benefit rules, household microdata on their incidence, a dated snapshot of the congressional bill record, and surveys that ask the same individuals about fertility, family benefits, and immigration. Table 2 pairs each hypothesis with the measure available.

Table 2. Operationalizing H1–H4 in the two cases

Hypothesis	1920s test	2020s test
H1 Compositional sorting	Quota slope on genetic distance and origin fertility, net of skill; ancestry against religion (1924 and 1929 schedules)	Entry-restriction schedule against the stated security criteria (counterfactual reconstruction); natal benefits restricted by citizenship and their incidence
H2 Selective association	Shared personnel across the campaigns (the state sterilization record supports no cross-state test; Appendix E.12)	Membership-conditioned versus universal natalist sponsorship and restrictionist sponsorship, 116th–119th Congresses; the same split within individuals
H3 National, not local	Native–foreign fertility differential on the contested restriction roll calls, 1907–1917	Within-person disposition on restrictionism, net of the “immigrants take jobs” item
H4 Joint product	Sterilization-adoption event study on the 1897–1924 roll-call panel	Joint enactment of the natalist and restrictionist architecture in one statute

H3 and H4 require elaboration. The labor-market account holds that restriction answers local economic competition, so the places receiving the most immigrants should have pushed hardest for restricted admission; its contemporary analog is the “immigrants take jobs” item, which the within-person model treats as the competing explanation. The causal-chain account suggests that one policy produces the other—pro-birth policy leads to closed borders, or closed borders create compensatory pro-birth policy (Melegh 2016; Perry et al. 2022; Indelicato and Magalhães Lopes 2024)—so one policy should precede the other in time. Our account hypothesizes a national commitment that does not rely on local labor market pressure and is also not sequential. The other rival explanations from Section II are tested where they are most likely to find support: civilizationism at the choice of criteria (Sections V.1 and VI.1), and welfare chauvinism at the benefit-by-benefit exclusion of pro-natal policy (Sections VI.2 and VI.3). The next sections test these predictions.

IV. Data and Measures

The historical period

For the historical analysis, we construct the dependent variable from the three quota laws enacted between 1921 and 1929. The 1921 Act set each country’s annual admission quota at 3 percent of its foreign-born population as recorded in the 1910 census. The 1924 Act reduced the quota rate to 2 percent and moved the base year to 1890—a deliberate choice that favored the earlier, Northern and Western European waves over recent arrivals. The 1929 formula abandoned the foreign-born base entirely and tied each quota to the origin’s share of the ancestry of the whole 1920 population. We measure the severity of restriction with the restriction ratio: an origin’s quota divided by its foreign-born population in the United States in 1920. A lower ratio means the origin was cut back more sharply relative to its existing presence, and the common 1920 denominator makes the three schedules directly comparable.³

We use genetic distance from Britain as the proxy for resemblance to the Anglo-Saxon population that contemporaries treated as the national core. Populations that separated longer ago have had more time to diverge in the traits passed across generations—language, religion, customs, and values (Spolaore and Wacziarg 2009). The measure is an imperfect but era-appropriate indicator: it summarizes what restrictionists called “stock,” and Britain anchors the scale because the architects of the quota system framed restriction as protection of the Anglo-Saxon founding population.⁴ To test ancestry against religion directly, we

³Two Baltic origins (Latvia and Estonia) were enumerated under the Russian Empire in the 1920 census, producing unreliable denominators; we exclude them from the estimation sample. The 1929 cross-section in column (4) retains Estonia, which received a quota under the National Origins Formula; excluding it there as well strengthens the distance gradient (Appendix E.2b).

⁴Distance from Britain operationalizes the architects’ own membership standard (Higham 1955; King 2000; Ngai 2004). Two further considerations support the anchor: the 1790 population was overwhelmingly of British origin, so the measure approximates distance from the founding stock the 1924 Congress tried

compiled the religious composition of all thirty-one quota origins circa 1920 from interwar national censuses and standard published references. We coded a Catholic-or-Orthodox indicator for every origin and a Jewish population share where a census or published count exists (thirteen of twenty-eight estimation origins; we treat that arm as secondary).

We construct each origin’s fertility premium from individual-level records of the 1910 census: the number of children under age five per woman of childbearing age, minus the same ratio for native-born white women. The premium measures how much faster an immigrant community was reproducing than the old stock—the race-suicide panic’s own quantity. The average premium was 0.18 children per woman, with wide variation: British immigrants matched native whites (-0.01), Poles exceeded them by 0.29, and Italians by 0.50.

We examine congressional voting at two levels. For the local-threat test we build county-by-congressional-district cells (following the crosswalks of Ferrara, Testa, and Zhou 2024) that pair each county or county fragment with its district, attaching the representative’s vote and the county’s 1920 census measures—the native–foreign fertility differential, exposure to genetically distant origins, the foreign-born share, urbanization, and manufacturing employment (Tabellini 2020; Biavaschi and Facchini 2020). The 1924 panel has 3,067 county cells, 2,790 of them with a recorded vote and roughly 2,694 in the estimation sample once covariates are nonmissing. Because the 1924 vote passed near-unanimously, we assemble the same design across the full sequence of fourteen final-passage restriction roll calls from 1897 to 1924 and utilize the contested subset—the six literacy-test fights and veto overrides of 1907–1917, with national Yea shares between 0.65 and 0.73—as this is where there is variance to explain (estimates in Table 6). The state sterilization record (Kaelber 2012; Laughlin 1922) and its measurement problems are documented in the appendix (Appendix E.12).

to recover by backdating the census base; and the 1920 population, which already reflects the immigration under study, would be a circular reference point.

The contemporary period

On the border, we code the June 2025 proclamation’s coverage of all 194 sovereign states—twelve fully suspended, seven partially—together with the criteria the proclamation itself cited: visa-overstay rates, terrorism-risk scores, state-sponsor designation, and state fragility.⁵ We add each country’s Muslim population share (Pew Research Center 2010) and the genetic-distance and regional measures from the historical analysis. The individual-level admission test re-analyzes the Hainmueller and Hopkins (2015) conjoint, in which respondents evaluate paired immigrant profiles whose attributes are independently randomized (Appendix B.5).

For the legislator test, we classify the substantive bills (bills and joint resolutions) introduced in the 116th through 119th Congresses from the GovInfo bulk bill-status records, taken as a June 2026 snapshot (the 116th through 118th complete, the 119th mid-session; GovInfo 2026). A keyword-and-subject initial screen followed by full-text reading yields 191 natalist bills and 451 restrictionist bills. Within the natalist set, a bill is membership-conditioned when its text conditions eligibility on a work-eligible Social Security number or on citizen or qualified-alien status—the design that excludes immigrant filers—and universal otherwise. Fourteen bills include this membership-conditioned design; 170 are universal; seven are ambiguous and left uncoded. Every member’s sponsorship and co-sponsorship of each class is linked to party, chamber, and DW-NOMINATE ideology score.

For the incidence of the enacted birth-side rules, we use pooled Current Population Survey data for 2023–2025, linking each child to co-resident parents and classifying families by the citizenship status of both. The broad measure—reported in the appendix as the upper

⁵The Visa Waiver Program, the standing in-group side of admission policy, supports no clean test: its statutory designation criterion, a visitor-visa refusal rate below three percent, cannot be measured comparably for member states (Appendix B.1). The refusal-rate schedule itself allocates on income rather than on membership criteria (Appendix E.21), and the case-control comparison reported in the circulated draft is retired on the same ground (Appendix E.23).

bound—counts citizen children with at least one noncitizen parent; the narrower measure, the refined estimate, excludes noncitizen parents with clear signs of lawful presence (Appendices B.12 and C.6). We cross-check against the 2024 American Community Survey.

At the individual level, no single survey includes every item we need, so we triangulate across three sources that vary the framing of pro-birth sentiment. The Pew American Trends Panel Wave 148 (May 2024; $N = 8,638$; Pew Research Center 2024) asks the national-frame question—what impact fewer children would have *on the country*—alongside a battery on universal natal policies and an immigration item, with the Christian-nationalism battery available for the same panelists from Wave 143 (Appendix B.10). The General Social Survey (GSS) allows us to test the family-ideal frame—the respondent’s ideal number of children for a family—beside a genuine policy item (whether immigration should be reduced) across eleven waves, 2004–2024 (Davern et al. 2025; Appendix B.11). The American National Election Studies (ANES) panel re-interviews the same respondents in 2016, 2020, and 2024 and includes an identically worded universal paid-leave item in all three waves, which permits a within-person test.

Two survey-based measures of the underlying disposition are analyzed in Section VI.4. The moral-traditionalism measure, our proxy from the circulated literature—a single item in the ANES panel and a four-item battery in the ANES cumulative file—carries the within-person design; the PRRI American Values Survey supplies a more face-valid measure—belief that immigrants are replacing the nation’s culture and background—for a cross-sectional test. The Democracy Fund VOTER panel’s racial-resentment battery provides a second, independent within-person design (Appendix E.19c). All estimates use survey weights.

Descriptive statistics for the principal analysis samples, historical and contemporary, are reported in Appendix E.1; the variables themselves are defined in Appendices A.7 and B.15.

V. Results for the Historical Era

V.1 The quotas price cultural distance—and fertility

The clearest evidence that admission policy sorted by resemblance to the existing population comes from the quota numbers themselves. The 1924 Act did not restrict immigration uniformly: Britain’s quota of 34,007 admitted roughly three percent of its 1920 American stock every year; Italy’s quota of 3,845 admitted under a quarter of one percent; Greece’s quota of 100 admitted six one-hundredths of one percent. Do the membership markers—cultural and historical distance from the national core, measured by genetic distance from Britain (Section IV), and the origin’s birth rate—explain where each origin falls across this range? We estimate:

$$Ratio_o = \alpha + \beta_1 Distance_o + \beta_2 FertilityPremium_o + \varepsilon_o \quad (1)$$

where *Ratio* is origin *o*’s restriction ratio, *Distance* is genetic distance from Britain, and *FertilityPremium* is the origin’s child-woman-ratio premium over native whites. Our theory predicts $\beta_1 < 0$ and $\beta_2 < 0$. We estimate the same equation on the 1929 schedule with the dependent variable in logs. With roughly twenty-eight origins, we report randomization-inference permutation p-values as the primary basis for inference.⁶ Table 3 reports the estimates.

Table 3. The national-origins quota schedule, 1924 and 1929

	(1) 1924, distance	(2) 1924, + fertility	(3) 1924, + religion	(4) 1929 NOF
Genetic distance from Britain	−1.80*** (0.67)	−1.40** (0.85)	−1.56** (0.57)	−109.9* (52.5)
— randomization-inference <i>p</i>	.007	.043	.020	.056
Origin fertility premium	—	−0.026 (0.015)	—	+0.771 (2.570)

⁶Asymptotic standard errors may be unreliable at this sample size; randomization inference permutes the origin-level regressor across origins 2,000 times and the reported p-value is the two-sided share of permutations.

	(1) 1924, distance	(2) 1924, + fertility	(3) 1924, + religion	(4) 1929 NOF
— randomization-inference p	—	.21	—	.69
Catholic or Orthodox origin	—	—	−0.013** (0.006)	—
— randomization-inference p	—	—	.013	—
N	28	28	28	29

*Dependent variable: restriction ratio (quota $\div$ 1920 origin foreign-born population); a lower ratio means the origin was cut back harder. Columns (1)–(3) use the 1924 schedule in levels; column (4) uses the 1929 National Origins Formula (NOF) in logs. Randomization inference (2,000 permutations of the origin-level regressor) is the primary inference, and the asterisks follow randomization inference. The statutes enumerate slightly different origin sets, so the estimation sample is 28 origins under the 1924 schedule and 29 under the 1929 formula (Appendix A.1). Complete estimates are in Appendices E.2 and E.3. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.*

In column (1), origins farther from the Anglo-Saxon population that contemporaries treated as the national core were admitted in smaller proportion to their existing American presence. The magnitude is large: moving from Britain’s distance to Italy’s lowers the predicted annual admission rate by 1.3 percentage points, roughly half the actual 2.7-point gap between the British and Italian ratios. Column (2) adds the fertility premium, which is negative but is not statistically significant using randomization inference; distance and fertility overlap heavily across origins, and the base-switch design of Table 5, below, separates them.⁷ Column (3) runs ancestry against religion. Catholic and Orthodox origins were cut harder, and in the 1929 cross-section religion retains an independent penalty beside distance. The distance coefficient barely moves when religion is included, however, and the within-origin contrasts—the sharper test—show the religion penalty never activating as the statutes deepened, while

⁷The N=28 cross-section tests whether the quota formula sorted origins by the bundled membership criterion—distance and relative fertility together—not whether the two dimensions separate at this sample size. The within-origin panel in Table 4 identifies when the criterion was activated, and the base-switch design in Table 5 is where the two dimensions separate.

the distance penalty does (Appendix E.3). In the 1920s, ancestry was the operative criterion; religion added little beyond it. Column (4) confirms the distance effect on the 1929 quota, which was the more explicitly descent-based rule.⁸ Figure 1 displays both schedules, with the high-fertility origins clustered at the bottom of each.

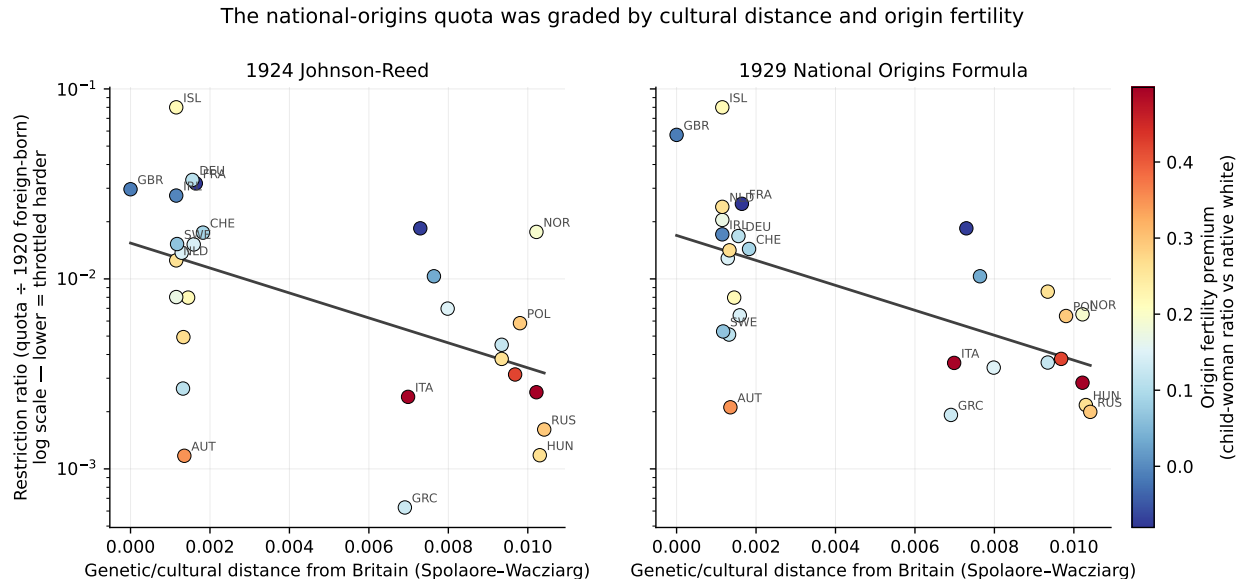


Figure 1: The 1924 and 1929 quotas by genetic distance from Britain. Each point is one of the twenty-eight denominator-reliable origins; the y-axis is the restriction ratio on a log scale, so a lower value is a harsher cut relative to the origin’s 1920 American presence; color encodes the origin fertility premium; the line is the ordinary least squares fit of the log restriction ratio on distance. Latvia and Estonia are excluded for unreliable 1920 denominators (Appendix A.1), and the underlying estimates are reported in Table 3.

The eugenics movement had its own measure of which origins burdened the nation, and the quota schedule did not follow it. Harry Laughlin, of the Eugenics Record Office, served the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization as its expert on eugenics. In 1922 he supplied that committee—then drafting the quotas—with a tabulation of how far each country of birth was over- or under-represented among the institutionalized “socially inadequate.” If the admission schedule were an instrument of eugenic science rather than of

⁸If the quota were pricing skill, it would track how skilled each origin’s immigrants were. It does not: adding the white-collar share of an origin’s American community leaves the distance and fertility penalties intact, and the skill term itself is null (Appendix E.6).

ancestry, Laughlin’s ranking is what it would follow. It is not: when we include that ranking in Table 3, the ranking predicts the cut weakly on its own, and it adds nothing once distance is included (Appendix E.9). The quota sorted by descent, not by skill and not by measured “degeneracy.”

We then ask when the sorting arrived. Italy’s quota under the 1921 Act, which used the recent 1910 census, admitted 2.6 percent of its American stock each year; under the 1924 Act, which used the 1890 census, 0.24 percent—an eleven-fold reduction for the same country—and the 1929 formula left the cut in place (0.36 percent). The stacked panel asks whether that pattern is systematic:

$$\ln(Ratio_{os}) = \delta_o + \delta_s + \gamma (Distance_o \times DescentDepth_s) + \varepsilon_{os} \quad (2)$$

where o indexes origins, s indexes the 1921, 1924, and 1929 schedules, and *DescentDepth* codes how deeply each statute reaches into descent (1921 = 0, the recent-census base; 1924 = 1, the backdated base; 1929 = 2, the ancestry base). The origin fixed effects absorb everything constant about an origin—its distance, its fertility, its lobby, its size—and the quota fixed effects absorb each statute’s level, so γ is identified only by whether the same origin was treated more harshly as the statute became more descent-based. In Table 4, we also estimate the unordered version, with statute indicators interacted with distance and the 1921 act as reference.

Table 4. The distance penalty within origin, across the three quota schedules

	(1) ordered DescentDepth	(2) schedule contrasts vs 1921
Genetic distance $\times$ DescentDepth (1921=0, 1924=1, 1929=2)	−61.93*** (18.76)	—
Origin fertility $\times$ DescentDepth	−0.17 (0.40)	—
Genetic distance $\times$ 1[1924]	—	−129.66*** (39.20)
Genetic distance $\times$ 1[1929]	—	−129.69*** (30.38)
N (origin $\times$ quota)	83	83

*Dependent variable: log restriction ratio with a common 1920 denominator. Origin fixed effects absorb the distance and fertility main effects; schedule fixed effects absorb each statute's level. Both coefficients in column (1) come from the single specification that carries the fertility interaction. Randomization-inference p-values: column (1) distance interaction .0025 and fertility interaction .81; column (2) 1924 contrast .002 and 1929 contrast .0005. Standard errors clustered by origin. Complete estimates are in Appendix E.4 and the permutation detail in Appendix E.5. The unordered fertility $\times$ schedule contrasts, the recency horse race, and the mechanical-identity caveat are in Appendix E.7. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.*

Column (2) shows when the penalty arrived. The 1921 Act carried no distance penalty, in the panel or in its own cross-section (Appendix E.2c); origins near and far were admitted in rough proportion to their existing population. The penalty appears at the 1924 population base switch, and the 1929 ancestry formula leaves it almost exactly where 1924 put it. The pattern, displayed in Figure 2, is a step: Congress attached the distance penalty the moment it backdated the base to 1890, and the penalty stayed in place. Nothing about the origins changed between 1921 and 1924; what changed is a legislative choice, the quota base, which the 1924 Congress selected precisely because the 1890 population predated the new immigration. The same 1921-versus-1924 contrast holds at the county level: the distance-exposure slope on the restriction vote is positive and statistically significant at the ten-percent level in 1924 but flat in 1921 (Appendix E.11).

The same base switch carried a reproductive signal. The 1924 Act changed two things at once: it lowered the quota rate from three percent to two, and it moved the base year from 1910 back to 1890. To isolate the second choice, we compare each origin's actual 1924 quota with the quota it would have received had Congress kept the two-percent rate but left the base at 1910. That comparison is the base-switch ratio, and it measures what the change of base year by itself cost each origin. Table 5 regresses it on the origin's fertility premium. The origins with the highest birth rates lost the most.

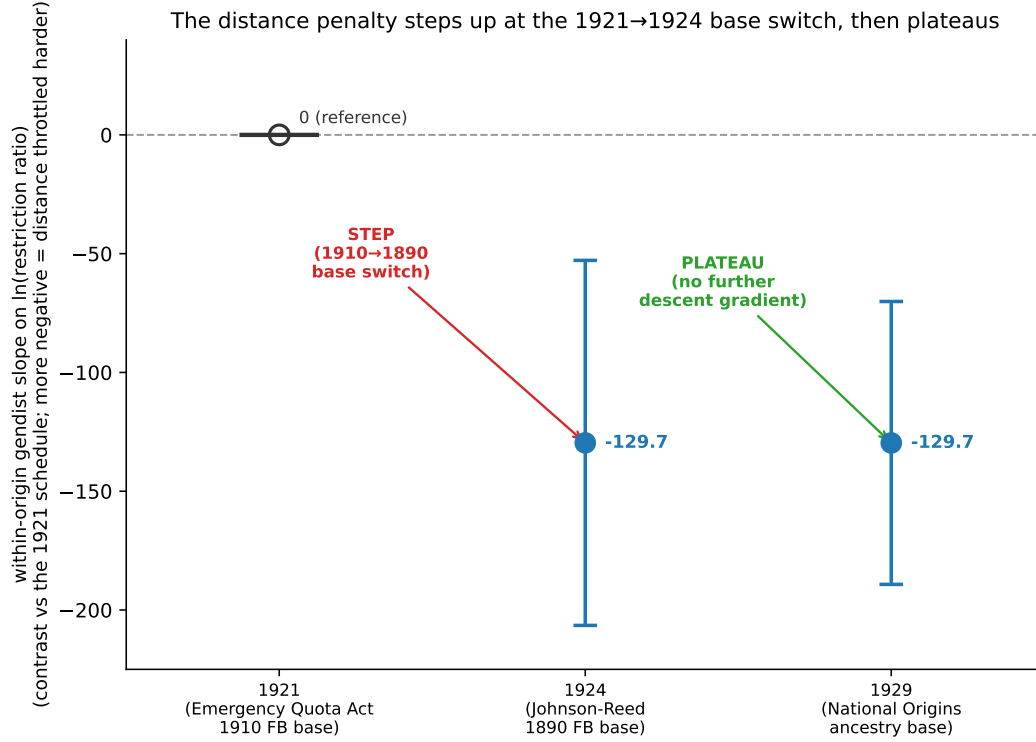


Figure 2: The distance penalty appears at the 1924 base switch and persists. Schedule-specific slopes of the log restriction ratio on genetic distance, with 95% cluster-robust confidence intervals, from the unordered specification (Table 4, column (2)): flat in 1921, steeply negative in 1924, unchanged in 1929. The 1921 schedule is the omitted reference, so its contrast is zero by construction; the coefficients, standard errors, and randomization-inference p-values are reported in Table 4.

Three considerations discipline that result. The first is skill. If the origins that lost most from the base switch were also the least skilled, the fertility premium might be standing in for labor quality rather than for reproduction. Adding the white-collar share of each origin’s American community leaves the fertility penalty essentially unchanged, and skill carries no weight of its own.

The second is arrival timing, which matters because of how the quota formula worked. The base counts the foreign-born population present in a given census year, so moving it back to 1890 automatically penalized groups that had arrived after that date. The high-fertility origins were disproportionately those later arrivals, so fertility and recency are entangled in the design itself. The fertility penalty survives an independent control for recency. It also survives a sharper version of the same test: we calculate the loss that arrival timing alone would produce for each origin, subtract it, and regress what remains on fertility. High-fertility origins were cut by more than the change of base year required.

The third consideration is the fertility measure itself. Our premium is built from the American community’s child-woman ratio, which arrival timing can contaminate, so we replace it with the origin country’s own birth rate—a quantity fixed abroad and independent of when a community migrated. In the League of Nations’ interwar series, higher origin-country fertility predicts a harsher cut. Britain and eight other origins are absent from that series, several of them heavily restricted, so we read the last column as corroboration rather than as a stand-alone test (Appendix E.8).

Table 5. The base-switch design: the 1890 base-priced fertility

	(1) Base switch	(2) + skill	(3) + recency	(4) Residual	(5) Own-country birth rate
Origin fertility premium	−2.038*** (0.585)	−1.870*** (0.562)	−1.676*** (0.557)	−1.457*** (0.547)	—
— randomization-inference p	<.0005	.002	.0005	.001	—
Own-country crude birth rate, 1905–1909	—	—	—	—	−0.00074** (0.00035)
— randomization-inference p	—	—	—	—	.022
White-collar skill share, 1910	—	+0.857 (0.705)	—	—	—

	(1) Base switch	(2) + skill	(3) + recency	(4) Residual	(5) Own-country birth rate
Recency (1 – share present by 1900)	—	—	−0.448*** (0.126)	—	—
Genetic distance from Britain	−31.2 (18.1)	−33.8* (19.1)	−11.7 (12.1)	−0.002 (10.96)	−0.461 (0.582)
N	21	21	21	21	19

*Dependent variable: columns (1)–(3), the base-switch ratio (1924 quota ÷ two percent of the 1910 foreign-born population), which isolates the base-year choice by holding the statutory rate constant; column (4), the residual of the base-switch ratio after netting out the cut predicted by recency alone; column (5), the restriction ratio, with the origin country’s own crude birth rate (League of Nations series) replacing the community fertility premium. HC-robust standard errors in parentheses; asterisks follow randomization inference (2,000 permutations of the key origin-level regressor). The fertility estimate survives dropping any single origin: across the twenty-one leave-one-out samples the column (1) coefficient ranges from −2.40 to −1.63 and the worst-case randomization-inference p is .003 (Appendix E.6d). In the stacked panel, the fertility×schedule contrasts show the same signal arriving at the 1924 base switch (−1.89, p = .092) and vanishing under the 1929 ancestry formula (−0.40, p = .67; Appendix E.7b). Full estimates: Appendices E.6, E.7, and E.8. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.*

The reproductive signal in the schedule is not an artifact of arrival timing. This prediction separates our account from ordinary ethnic exclusion: among origins at comparable distance, those reproducing more rapidly had their admissions cut more severely.

The fertility cut, unlike the distance penalty, did not outlast the instrument that produced it. It arrives with the 1924 base switch and disappears under the 1929 formula, which is why the ordered fertility interaction in Table 4 is null (Appendix E.7). The reason is arithmetic. A statute built on the foreign-born stock treats reproduction as a liability; a statute built on ancestry counts the American-born children too, and returns to high-fertility origins what the base switch took from them. The penalty therefore tracks the design of the instrument rather than any fixed attribute of the origins—a pattern that a spurious correlation with

fertility would be unlikely to produce. In 1924, border policy operated in part as fertility policy.

V.2 The association of natal and immigration policy in the 1920s

Our second hypothesis is that natal control and border control formed parts of one program. The personnel record makes the connection directly. Harry Laughlin wrote the model sterilization statute adopted across the states while serving as the eugenics expert of the House Immigration Committee that designed the 1924 quotas; Madison Grant campaigned for sterilization laws and supplied the intellectual case for restriction; the same progressive economists argued for restriction on labor grounds and for eugenic selection in the same writings (Leonard 2016; Spiro 2009). There was no division of labor between the campaigns that targeted births and those that targeted admission. Record-level studies show whom the natal side reached: in California’s files, Latino and Asian immigrant patients were sterilized at rates far above their share of the institutionalized population (Novak et al. 2018; Kaniecki et al. 2023).

On the congressional side, the House passed the 1924 Act 323–71: thirty-four of forty-eight delegations voted unanimously for it, and only 64 of 2,790 county cells register a Nay. That near-unanimity is not a nuisance; it is the finding. By 1924, restriction was a national commitment rather than a state-level response.

V.3 National commitment, not local threat; joint product, not sequence

The labor-market rival predicts that restriction should have been strongest where immigrant competition was strongest. The 1924 vote cannot discriminate between that account and ours: what opposition there was came from urban, immigrant-heavy districts occupying fractions of a single county, leaving almost no cross-sectional variance. The sharper test is therefore the period when restriction was still contested. We examine the six literacy-test roll

calls of 1907–1917, assembled as a county-district-by-vote panel of 13,760 cells. These votes reveal where restrictionist support was strongest before the national-origins system locked in near-unanimous passage—and whether that support tracked local immigrant competition or a broader membership commitment. Table 6 reports the estimates.

Table 6. Rival mechanisms on the contested roll calls, and the timing test

Test	Estimate	Reading
H3: native–foreign fertility differential, contested votes (Conley SEs, vote×state FE)	−0.017 (0.011), ns	no local demographic threat
— same, vote×region FE / two-way cluster	−0.024 (0.029) / −0.016 (0.018), ns	robust null
Foreign-born share, contested votes	−0.913 (0.201)***	immigrant political voice (Goldin 1994)
H4: post-adoption restrictionism, Callaway–Sant’Anna (state × vote)	−0.073 (0.052), ns	no eugenics→restriction sequence

*Contested-vote models include distance exposure, foreign-born share, urbanization, manufacturing, and the naturalized-franchise share; Conley spatial standard errors at 200 km (full estimates in Appendix E.10). The H4 row aggregates the staggered-adoption event study (Callaway and Sant’Anna 2021) on the 1897–1924 panel (full estimates in Appendix E.11; the asymptotic standard error is shown, and the wild-bootstrap standard error is 0.0545). The formal pre-trend test on this sparse fourteen-vote panel is numerically unstable, so we interpret the event study descriptively (Appendix E.11c); the within-panel co-movement of adoption timing and restrictionist voting is negative and statistically significant (−0.187, SE 0.072, randomization-inference $p = .024$; Appendix E.12), as is the cross-lag of restriction on lagged adoption (−0.176, SE 0.072; Appendix E.11d). * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.*

H3 holds that demographic threat operates as a national commitment, not a local reaction. Districts facing the widest gaps between native and foreign fertility should be no more restrictionist than others. In Table 5, that differential is null under every specification. By contrast, the models recover the local pressures that were present: where immigrants could vote, delegations resisted restriction, replicating Goldin (1994), and manufacturing exposure

enters as the labor-market account expects. Local demographic threat is not among the forces that moved these votes.

H4 predicts that natal and border control arise together, not in sequence. In other words, immigration restriction should not follow the adoption of eugenic legislation. It does not. States that enacted sterilization statutes did not become more restrictionist afterward; if anything, adoption is followed by less restrictionist voting (Table 5). The eugenics-first ordering required by a causal-chain account does not appear. Combined with the personnel evidence in Section V.2, the two campaigns ran side by side, in the same hands, rather than one producing the other.

VI. The Contemporary Configuration

VI.1 The border

The modern counterpart to the 1924 quota schedule is the June 2025 proclamation, which suspended entry from twelve countries and limited it from seven more. The religious gradient is plain: one in five Muslim-majority states was restricted, compared with one in fourteen of the rest. The proclamation’s stated security criteria—overstay rates, terrorism scores, state-sponsor designation, and fragility—account for most of this list, but not all of it. Ranking the world’s countries by those criteria and restricting the top nineteen recovers only fifteen of the actual nineteen (Appendices C.4 and E.13b). Of the four discrepancies, three of the unexplained inclusions are Muslim-majority; the most conspicuous omission, Syria, is political rather than security-driven. A four-country pattern is suggestive, but it cannot establish the marker on its own: across all countries, the unexplained cases show no religious tilt (Appendix E.14).

Two further patterns fit this reading. First, the overstay rule—the strongest of the stated criteria—separates restricted from unrestricted countries on average, but not case by case. Several countries on the list have lower overstay rates than countries left off it (Appendix

E.14). Second, the fertility penalty documented in 1924 does not reappear. Origin fertility predicts restriction on its own, but the association disappears once the stated security criteria are included (Appendix E.15). Whatever marker operates at today’s border, it is not the reproductive one; that criterion was specific to the 1924 instrument. A clearer test of the religious marker, at the individual level, follows.

We can approach this another way. Table 7 reports our re-analysis of the Hainmueller and Hopkins (2015) admission conjoint described in Section IV, fielded more than a decade before the proclamation. A Muslim-majority origin carries a penalty of five percentage points net of the immigrant’s randomized education, profession, and language, and the penalty is no different for the highly educated. The final row of Table 7 makes the comparison that matters for our argument: across the ten origins, the penalty is flat in genetic distance from Britain—the criterion of 1924—while it sorts sharply on religion, the marker of the present era.

Table 7. The admission conjoint: religion, not ancestry, prices the contemporary penalty

	Forced choice	Admission support
Muslim-majority origin, net of skill	−0.051*** (0.012)	−0.042*** (0.012)
— penalty, high-education profiles	−0.057	—
— penalty, low-education profiles	−0.048	—
Non-European origin, net of skill	−0.030** (0.012)	—
Genetic distance from Britain (individual-level slope)	+0.04 (0.40), p = .92	−0.27 (0.39), p = .49
N (profiles / respondents)	14,018 / 1,404	14,018 / 1,404

Re-analysis of the Hainmueller and Hopkins (2015) immigrant-admission conjoint (Appendix B.5): linear probability models with post-stratification weights and standard errors clustered on the respondent; origin penalties are net of the profile’s randomized education, profession, gender, language, experience, and prior trips. The distance slope is the individual-level coefficient on the origin’s genetic distance from Britain, net of skill. Full estimates, the origin-level average marginal component effects, and the education interaction are in Appendix E.16.

** $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.*

VI.2 The association of natal and immigration policy in Congress

At the congressional level, is pro-birth lawmaking associated with restriction? Table 8 reports the legislator test on the substantive bills introduced in the 116th–119th Congresses.

Table 8. Natalist and restrictionist sponsorship, 116th–119th Congresses

	(1) Pooled	(2) Republicans only	(3) Any-activity LPM
Membership-conditioned natalist activity	1.395*** (0.394)	1.244*** (0.465)	0.076** (0.033)
Universal natalist activity	0.212*** (0.054)	−0.019 (0.136)	−0.277*** (0.020)
N (member × congress × chamber)	1,906	937	1,906

*Dependent variable: restrictionist bills sponsored and co-sponsored (column 3: any, estimated as a linear probability model, LPM). Congress fixed effects throughout; columns 1 and 3 add party and DW-NOMINATE ideology; standard errors clustered by member. Randomization inference on the column (2) specification (2,000 permutations of membership-conditioned activity across Republican members, seed 20260606): $b = 1.244$, $p < .0005$. One hundred five members—77 of them Republicans—carry membership-conditioned activity, and the coefficient survives dropping any single member (minimum $b = 1.09$, largest $p = .016$; Appendix E.17). The pooled positive coefficient on universal activity in column 1 reflects cross-party composition; it is absent within party and reverses in column 3. Full table and the 118th–119th-only baseline in Appendix E.17. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.*

H2 predicts that pro-birth lawmaking splits and that the membership-conditioned half is correlated with immigration restriction. Table 8 shows that division. Nine in ten pro-birth bills extended benefits to all parents, regardless of citizenship. Sponsors of those universal bills are no more likely—and within party, less likely—to sponsor restrictionist immigration bills. The pattern is different for the smaller set of bills that limit benefits to citizens. A Republican who sponsors that kind of natal legislation sponsors about 1.2 more restrictionist bills, a relationship that survives permutation inference and the loss of any single member (Appendix E.17).

The division is what separates our account from the alternatives. Ordinary nationalism and ordinary pronatalism expect no such split: if pro-birth politics simply traveled with restriction, both kinds of natal bills should show the same relationship. They do not. Welfare chauvinism also fails here. It predicts that benefits will be gated to citizens across the board and says nothing about immigration. It cannot explain why the citizenship limit appears on natal benefits while nutrition programs for pregnant women and infants remain open to everyone—a pattern the next section shows. The laws actually enacted in 2025 follow the same line: the natal provisions that passed were the ones limited to citizens.

VI.3 The birth-side schedule and its incidence

The 2025 statute, summarized in Table 9, wrote the membership criterion into benefit design and enacted both agendas at once. The same law that created the citizen-only newborn account and conditioned the child tax credit on parental citizenship also funded the era’s expansion of border enforcement (P.L. 119-21; Table 7). Natal and restrictionist policy arrived together, in a single statute, with no sequence between them—exactly the joint enactment H4 predicts.

Table 9. The membership-conditioned natal schedule, 2025, and its incidence

Instrument	Conditioning	Status	Incidence (CPS 2023–2025)
“Trump Accounts” \$1,000 newborn account	United States-citizen newborn with SSN only	enacted	610,574 of 3,411,886 newborns excluded (17.9%)
Child Tax Credit, SSN rule	work-eligible SSN required for child and filing parent	enacted, permanent	9,314,884 citizen children excluded (13.8%); refined, 8,870,963 (13.1%)
WIC (nutrition for pregnant women and infants)	none—any status	the informative unconditioned case	no exclusion
Birthright-citizenship order (EO 14160)	denies citizenship to United States-born children by parental status	enjoined	—
Public-charge rule	penalized immigrant safety-net use in pregnancy and child-rearing	vacated (2021)	—

Statutory citations and legal posture are given in the text. Incidence estimates pool the CPS 2023–2025, annualized: the upper bound counts citizen children with at least one noncitizen parent; the refined estimate removes noncitizen parents with directly observed lawful-presence signals. The independent ACS 2024 bound agrees within a percentage point (12.8 percent). Construction in Appendix B.12; full detail, including composition by origin and state, in Appendix E.13d.

The policy design is selective, benefit by benefit—the WIC exception shows that universal natal support remained available where Congress chose it—and its incidence is not neutral with respect to origin. Among citizen children excluded from the credit by the parental SSN rule, two-thirds are Hispanic and fewer than one in twenty traces to a European parental origin. Citizenship status, the criterion the post-civil-rights state can lawfully use, sorts births by ancestry in effect.

The coercive direction appears in the same policy: the birthright-citizenship order sought to determine by parental status which births count as members, and the public-charge rule, while in force, penalized immigrant families for safety-net use during pregnancy. Both were stopped by courts. A bipartisan Senate investigation of the Irwin County detention center documented excessive and often nonconsensual gynecological procedures performed on detained immigrant women; the investigation did not substantiate mass sterilization, and we treat the episode as an isolated abuse rather than policy, but it sits in the same cell of Table 1. Abortion restriction, the most prominent reproductive policy of the period, is deliberately absent from this schedule; Section VII explains why the theory predicts its absence.

VI.4 The split within individuals

If a single disposition underlies policy at both channels, the pattern observed in Congress should reappear in individual attitudes. Restrictionism should be associated with the belief that declining fertility is bad for the country; it should not be associated with family-ideal

pronatalism, with support for universal family benefits, or with opposition to abortion; we take up abortion at length in section VII. No single survey carries every item we need, so we test the prediction across three sources, with two independent within-person panels carrying the disposition measures. The results are consistent (Table 10).

Table 10. Pro-birth sentiment and restrictionism at the individual level

Source and frame	Estimate	Design
Pew W148: fewer children bad <i>for the country</i>	+0.140*** → +0.082*** (CN control) → +0.021 ns (pooled party and ideology); within party, R +0.039***, D +0.059**	cross-section, N ≈ 4,100
Pew W148: universal natal-policy battery	−0.094*** → null within party	same respondents
GSS 2004–2024: ideal number of children for a family	−0.007 ns → −0.049*** (with party/ideology)	11 waves, N ≈ 14,000
GSS 2004–2024: seven-item pro-life scale	+0.429*** → +0.009 ns (disposition, party, ideology)	11 waves, N ≈ 8,800
ANES 2016–2024: universal paid-leave support	−0.038** → ns (upper 95% bound +0.008)	within person, person FE
ANES 2016–2024: moral traditionalism	+0.069*** → +0.054*** (full horse race)	within person, person FE
VOTER 2011–2020: racial resentment	+0.141*** → +0.104*** (net of jobs item)	within person, person FE, N = 19,101
PRRI: immigrants replacing the nation’s culture	+0.646*** → +0.506*** (party and ideology) → +0.437*** (+ jobs item, 2022 wave)	cross-section

*Full tables, item wording, and measurement notes in Appendix E.18; all estimates weighted. The Pew immigration item is a salience measure, and its natal battery measures perceived policy efficacy; the GSS supplies the policy-preference outcome, the family-ideal frame, and the pro-life scale, whose specification ladder and single-item companion are in Appendix E.20; the ANES supplies the support-framed universal benefit and the within-person design; the Democracy Fund VOTER panel replicates the within-person design in a second sample and decade (Appendix E.19c); the PRRI replacement-belief estimate is in Appendix E.19a, and its jobs-item column is estimable only in the 2022 wave. CN = Christian nationalism. Random form splits (each item fielded to half the panel) halve the Pew analytic sample. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.*

Three patterns stand out. First, the belief that fewer children would harm the country predicts restrictionism. In the Pew data, the relationship survives a Christian-nationalism control and appears within both parties. Once party and ideology are controlled, the pooled coefficient is absorbed (Appendix E.18), but the within-party estimates—the sharper test, given that partisan identity itself incorporates dispositions of this kind (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002)—remain positive and significant for both Republicans and Democrats (Table 10).

Second, family-ideal pronatalism does not predict restrictionism. Preference for a larger ideal family size shows no positive association across twenty years of the GSS; the coefficient is null and turns negative once party and ideology enter. Within the same person over time, growing support for a universal paid-leave mandate likewise leaves restrictionism unchanged, and the null is tight: the data rule out even a small positive association, well below what the disposition items carry (Appendix E.18). Where the universal frame is statistically significant at all, its sign is negative. Within person, paid-leave support predicts less restriction on birthright citizenship and on Dreamers, and the GSS respondents who volunteer that families should have “as many children as you want” are less restrictionist, not more (Appendix E.18). Opposition to abortion behaves the same way. Its raw association with restrictionism is large, as a shared party coalition implies, but it attenuates to a precise null once the disposition, party, and ideology enter (Appendix E.20).

Finally, attitudes that more closely track the composition of the national population behave as expected. Growing moral traditionalism is positively associated with restrictionism in the ANES panel even after a full set of controls, while within-person change in party identification predicts nothing (Appendix E.19e); the association is not partisan realignment in disguise. The VOTER panel reproduces the within-person result in a second sample and a different decade, net of the labor-market item. In the PRRI data, the belief that immigrants are replacing the nation’s culture predicts restrictionism at +0.65, and at +0.44 after party, ideology, demographics, and the labor-market item (Appendix E.19a). These results demon-

strate that fertility anxiety framed as a national loss is associated with restriction; family policy framed as help for parents is not—the individual-level counterpart of the pattern in Table 8.

Taken together, the contemporary record fills all four cells of Table 1, though not with equal weight. Two are documented systematically: religion-sorted exclusion at the border, and natal support limited to citizens. The third—coercive instruments aimed at disfavored births—appears only as enjoined orders, a vacated rule, and one investigated episode, not as standing policy. The fourth—preference for co-ethnics or co-nationals—shows up in the discretionary admission record, from nationality-specific parole to the 2025 Afrikaner refugee priority (Appendices B.14 and E.22). In both eras a single standard runs through birth and immigration policy. The standard has not changed; the markers have—ancestry in 1924, religion and citizenship a century later (Figure 3).

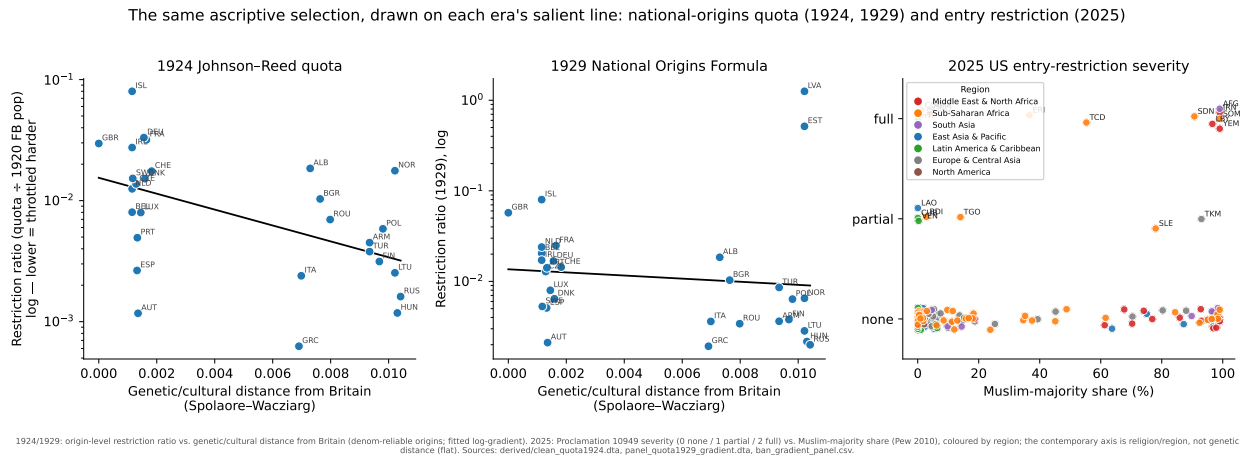


Figure 3: The boundary on comparable axes, a century apart: the 1924 quota and the 1929 formula (restriction ratio versus distance from Britain) beside the 2025 proclamation (severity versus Muslim-majority share).

VII. Discussion

The finding that birth and immigration policy applied one membership criterion, and that only membership-conditioned natalism is associated with restriction, speaks to several lit-

eratures that treat these domains separately. FitzGerald and Cook-Martín (2014) show that democracies pioneered racist immigration selection because accountable governments answered mobilized publics; the eugenics literature documents who built the sterilization regime and whom it reached (Lombardo 2008; Ladd-Taylor 2017; Novak et al. 2018; Kaniecki et al. 2023). Neither body of work asks whether the two regimes moved together or whether one criterion was built into both. We show that it was and that the pattern is systematic.

The universalist wing of contemporary pro-birth politics sharpens the argument rather than weakening it. Abortion restriction works against compositional preservation. Immigrant and minority fertility exceeds native fertility, and post-Dobbs limits bind most tightly on lower-income and minority women who are least able to travel for care. The result is a higher share of births to groups the preservationist project seeks to limit, relative to a world of legal access (Roberts 1997; Ross and Solinger 2017). If the disposition examined here were simply the politics of the pro-birth right, that outcome would be an anomaly. Instead, it reflects the division the theory implies. Abortion restriction occupies no cell of Table 1; it is the universalist counterpart of membership-conditioned natalism. The two coalitions share a party without sharing a logic.

The evidence matches that division at every level. Universal natalist sponsorship is not associated with restriction in Congress (Table 6). Support for universal family benefits is not associated with restriction within individuals. And across twenty years of the General Social Survey, a pro-life scale that has a large raw association with restrictionism falls to a precise null once the disposition, party, and ideology are held constant (Table 8; Appendix E.20). What is associated with the border is the membership-conditioned strand of pro-birth politics, not the pro-life strand.

The same split appears over reproductive technology. Much of the religious right regards IVF with suspicion because it creates, selects among, and discards embryos; the composition-oriented wing has moved the other way—the administration that restricted the newborn

account by citizenship also sought to expand IVF access (Executive Order 14216, 2025). The historical parallel is consistent: the Catholic Church opposed sterilization on doctrinal grounds throughout the eugenic era while its parishioners bore the brunt of the quota laws (Kevles 1985; Reilly 1991). In both centuries, religious universalism about reproduction stands apart from, and at times against, the membership-conditioned natalism that pairs with the border.

The deepest implication concerns how liberal democracies maintained selection after explicit ethnic criteria became untenable. Joppke (2005) interprets ethnic selection in the liberal state as residual. Our findings support a different reading. Legislators shifted the criterion from the face of the statute into its design—through the choice of census base in 1924, and through eligibility formulas and country lists today—placing it beyond the reach of challenges aimed at named categories.

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VIII. Conclusion

Governments that subsidize births while restricting immigration appear in the 1920s and again in the 2020s. The technocratic view of population policy treats the two as substitutes and therefore finds the pairing puzzling. The explanation we have defended is a single membership criterion applied to the two channels through which a nation gains members. In

the 1920s the criterion was ancestry, stated openly: the quota schedules priced cultural and historical distance from Britain, the penalty arrived precisely when Congress backdated the quota base, and, within origin, the cut fell hardest on the fastest-reproducing communities. In the 2020s, the criterion operates through the markers a post-civil-rights state can lawfully use: entry restrictions that fall disproportionately on Muslim-majority countries and are not fully accounted for by their stated rationale; natal benefits restricted to citizen children, whose exclusions land overwhelmingly on families of non-European origin; and a congressional and attitudinal record in which only membership-conditioned natalism is associated with restriction.

These findings help explain the recurrence of the pairing, and they constrain how it should be read. The two policies are not links in a causal chain: no sequence connects them in the roll-call record, and no local demographic threat drives the votes. They are joint products of one commitment, made by the same coalitions—at times by the same individuals—at the two channels where the nation’s next generation is assembled. The near-unanimity of the 1924 vote, at every level we measure, is part of the same fact: by the time the criterion reached the statute books it was a national settlement rather than a local reaction.

The decades between our two cases mark the scope of the claim rather than its refutation. The Holocaust and the civil rights settlement removed explicit ancestry from the state’s repertoire; the baby boom removed the demographic anxiety that gives selective natalism its constituency (Teitelbaum and Winter 1985). Sustained fertility decline after the 1970s and large-scale immigration from regions coded as culturally distant restored both conditions (Coleman 2006; Kaufmann 2018), and the configuration returned with the criteria changed. For scholarship on migration and on the welfare state, the lesson is a division that current research does not draw: pro-birth policy is not one thing. Its universal strand belongs to family policy; its membership-conditioned strand belongs to border politics. Treating the two as a single “pronatalism” conceals the coalition that matters. A politics that decides which babies and which immigrants will make up the next generation is a single politics, and

it must be studied whole.

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