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MPIDR Working Paper WP 2026-007 | March 2026
https://doi.org/10.4054/MPIDR-WP-2026-007

# Ideology Over Evidence: Pronatalist Media Discourse and Its (Dis)connection from U.S. Fertility Trends

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**Title**: Ideology Over Evidence: Pronatalist Media Discourse and Its (Dis)connection from U.S. Fertility Trends

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## Abstract

Pronatalism — the ideology promoting increased birth rates as a political and civilizational imperative — has experienced a resurgence in U.S. media and policy discourse, yet scholars have long argued it functions as ideological framing rather than evidence-based demographic policy. This study tests that argument directly by examining whether empirical changes in fertility rates predict the volume and tone of pronatalism-adjacent media coverage across politically distinct U.S. outlets. Drawing on age- and race/ethnicity-specific fertility data, alongside article volume and tone data from the Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone (GDELT) over the period 2017-2022, we analyze coverage of four themes—fertility rates, population and demographic change, aging populations, and reproductive and maternal health—across 23 conservative, progressive, and neutral news outlets. Using linear regression models with year fixed effects, we find that changes in fertility rates do not significantly predict article volume for any outlet type or theme. Results for tone are similarly null, with one exception: increases in fertility among women aged 25–44 are significantly associated with more positive coverage of reproductive and maternal health in progressive outlets, likely reflecting political rather than demographic dynamics. The most pronounced shifts in coverage — particularly conservative outlets' dramatically more positive tone following the 2020 election — appear driven by electoral context rather than demographic reality. These findings provide quantitative support for the claim that pronatalist media discourse selectively deploys demographic evidence in order to operate as an ideological regime of truth.

## Keywords:

Pronatalism, Demographic Discourse, Fertility Rates, Reproductive Politics, Ethnonationalism, Biopolitics

## Introduction

Documentation of falling and low fertility rates and changes in the ratio of adult workers to children and older dependents has led to a resurgence of media coverage on pronatalism in the United States. This coverage is underscored by the traditional family norms, such as those proposed by the Heritage Foundation in Project 2025, which serves as the 'roadmap' for policy in the second Trump presidential administration (Barrón-López & Shrai, 2024; Lucassen, 2010; Perry & Grubbs, 2025). While historically the most coercive state interventions to promote increased birth rates fell in between World War I and World War II under authoritarian regimes, changing relationships between populist politics, the availability of demographic statistics, and state interests have produced a resurging interest in promoting pronatalist policies and programs. This has been particularly evident in the prevalence of conservative podcasters' focus on low fertility, Elon Musk's personal brand of pronatalism displayed in White House press conferences, and Trump's goal to become the 'fertilization president' (Brady, 2025; Gietel-Basten, 2023; Kirk, 2020).

Pronatalism is a specific ideology that promotes the reproduction of human life through high birth rates as a fundamental value central to human civilization (McKeown, 2014). Despite proponents' frequent link to demographic patterns of low period fertility rates and increasing dependency ratios, it is not an evidence-based approach to policy, programs, or everyday life–it is an ideological one. Recent research links increasing demographic "anxiety" due to declining fertility rates to narratives—amongst figures in popular culture, politicians, and others—surrounding "underpopulation crises" (Brady, 2025; Perry & Grubbs, 2025). These anxieties are variously linked to conspiracy theories suggesting that the "native" White population in the U.S. is being systematically replaced by immigrant groups (the "Great Replacement" theory), extremist violence, and disparaging misogynist remarks regarding child-free citizens, particularly women (Brady, 2025; Perry & Grubbs, 2025). This train of thought can be linked back to the early 20$^{th}$ century, when similar framing was used by political figures such as Theodore Roosevelt to suggest that "race suicide" would occur among White Americans if birth rates did not change (Lovett, 2007). Such framing resulted in both positive and negative eugenic policies in the U.S., promoting sterilization among those the state targeted, including women of color and women deemed "feebleminded", and encouraging child-bearing among those considered ideal citizens by the state (Lovett, 2007; Roberts, 1998). More recently, the overturning of Roe vs. Wade and promotion of expanded in vitro fertilization (IVF) access among specific populations by the Trump administration have been viewed as significant pronatalist interventions by scholars, which occur alongside policies like mass deportation and ending birthright citizenship designed to deny state recognition to groups deemed "undesirable" (Brady, 2025; Forat & Bartz, 2025).

Despite existing evidence that links pronatalist ideology to ethno-nationalist state building, especially in authoritarian political settings (Brown & Feree, 2005; Forati & Bartz, 2021; King 2002; Perry, McElroy, Schnabel, & Grubbs, 2022), and the recognition that pronatalism is an ideology, many pundits and even some scientists draw on demographic evidence to support pronatalist discourse and policies (Chen, Lloyd, & Yip, 2018; Coole, 2012; Demeny, 2003; Grant, Hoorens, Sivadasan et al, 2006). Here, we interrogate this linkage by asking, "Is media discourse on pronatalist themes linked to empirical changes in period fertility rates in the United States?" In other words, does media coverage of pronatalist topics function as an ideological framing that is independent of demographic realities? To do this we draw on two main data sources: U.S. register-based birth rate and population data to construct race/ethnicity and age-specific fertility rates, and article count and tone data drawn from the Global Database of Events, Language and Tone (hereafter GDELT) over the period of the first Trump administration (January 2017 to December 2020) and for the first two years of the Biden administration (January 2021 to December 2022). We additionally include a measure of the political ideological orientation (conservative, neutral, or progressive) of the media outlets we draw on to assess whether different outlet biases influence these associations (Otero, von Wald, Fox-Ramirez, & Heldebrandt, 2025; Pew Research Center, 2025).

We use these data to predict whether fertility declines—in the general female population and in race/ethnicity and age-specific populations—predict article volume of pronatalist themes and whether the tone of these articles is more positive or negative. We do this by using the GDELT V2Tone outputs, which compute a score of the words with positive emotional connotations minus those with negative emotional connotations (GDELT, 2015). This scoring uses a proprietary natural language processing approach and has been shown to be comparable to much larger models (GDELT, 2015). This approach allows us to examine whether media coverage of pronatalist themes acts as a response to empirical demographic shifts or whether increased coverage puts forward increased birth rates as a naturalized policy imperative decoupled from demographic fact. We propose that the absence of an association between changes in the fertility rate and volume and tone of media coverage would directly support our argument that articles covering pronatalist themes represent ideological value judgements rather than news reporting being calibrated to demographic reality.

## The Context of Low Fertility & Pronatalism-qua-Science

### *Low Fertility, Dependency Ratios, and Demographic Anxiety*

Global fertility decline has been one of the most consequential demographic shifts of the past century. By the early 2000s, approximately 44% of the world's population lived in countries at or below replacement level, usually defined as a period Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of 2.1—a threshold that is itself

empirically imprecise (Caldwell, McDonald, & Caldwell, 2002; Gietel-Basten & Scherbov, 2020). By this time, many countries were already experiencing very low fertility—defined as a TFR below 1.5—concentrated in former USSR territories, Eastern and Southern Europe, Germany, Austria, Japan, and parts of East Asia (Caldwell et al., 2002). These trends have continued, with half the world's population living in sub-replacement countries as of 2026 and parts of East Asia and Southern Europe reaching ultra-low levels between 1.0 and 1.4 (Sobotka, Matysiak, & Brzozowska, 2019). The causes are structurally rooted: the expansion of contraceptive access, economic insecurity, persistent gender inequalities in the domestic division of labor, and intensifying parenting norms that make childrearing more costly and demanding (Caldwell et al., 2002; Sobotka et al., 2019).

The policy concern most frequently invoked in response to these trends centers on old-age dependency ratios and the fiscal strain an aging population places on pension systems and public budgets. This concern is not entirely without basis: very low fertility around 1.1 has been shown to eventually undermine living standards and strain public finances, though moderately low fertility, around 1.6, may actually improve material standards of living by enabling "capital deepening"—concentrating investment per worker rather than diluting it across a growing population (Lee, Mason, et al., 2014). The assumed links between population size and GDP per capita, innovation, and national welfare are empirically weak, and smaller populations can yield meaningful environmental and infrastructural benefits (Coleman & Rowthorn, 2011). Conventional dependency ratios based solely on biological age are themselves misleading, failing to account for the paid, voluntary, and unpaid contributions of people over 65 (MacInnes & Diaz, 2007).

Despite this nuance, public and political discourse tends toward alarmism that is rarely rooted in scientific evidence and is instead organized around states' interests in maintaining ideologically defined populations (Coleman & Rowthorn, 2011; King, 2018; Krause & Marchesi, 2007). Demographic trends are routinely perceived as threats to the "imagined community" of the nation, prompting states to engage in population engineering aimed at preserving national identity or economic strength (King, 2002). In the United States, this project is particularly aimed at preserving White Christian populations that reflect an imagined historical reality (Lovett, 2007). This has resulted in conspiracy theories related to the "native" White population being systematically replaced by immigrant groups, extremist violence, and misogynistic comments related to women's childbearing (Brady, 2025; Perry & Grubbs, 2025). By asking why fertility is low and how to raise it, demographic research itself reinforces the problem framing, lending scientific authority to the assumption that low fertility requires state intervention (King, 2018). Professional demographers generally advocate for a wide interval of non-intervention—recommending action only when TFRs fall below 1.4 or rise above 3.0—yet politically conservative demographers are significantly more likely than their liberal or progressive colleagues to support fertility intervention,

suggesting that professional expertise is not insulated from political values (Van Dalen & Henkens, 2021).

This dynamic connects pronatalism to a broader logic of biopolitical governance in which the state comes to understand the population as a resource to be optimized rather than a community of individuals with rights and aspirations (Foucault, 1978). The measurement, quantification, and classification of populations through indicators like birth rates and dependency ratios become techniques through which states justify interventions that are political in character but technical in presentation (Lee, 2024). When pronatalist actors cite fertility decline as the impetus for pronatalist interventions, they draw on the legitimacy of scientific discourse to naturalize a political project rather than to neutrally describe reality—deploying what Foucault called a "regime of truth" in the service of a politics organized not around birth rates in the aggregate but around whose population deserves to grow (Foucault, 1978).

### *Using Demographic Framing to Justify Pronatalist Policies*

Demographic thought has not evolved through steady scientific refinement but rather through sharp changes shaped by political conditions, funding priorities, and ideological agendas (Hodgson, 1988). Once particular framings become institutionally entrenched, they can persist even when the empirical evidence shifts in new directions (Hodgson, 1988). The most politically durable of these framings constructs fertility decline as an unrealized but imminent crisis. Researchers and officials have converged on a set of interlocking alarmist logics—shrinking workforces, collapsing pension systems, rising dependency ratios, and eventual population “collapse”—that cast low fertility as requiring urgent pronatalist intervention despite the possibility for alternative approaches (Caldwell, McDonald, & Caldwell, 2002; Grant, Hoorens, Sivadasan, et al., 2006). For example, European demographic change has been characterized as a civilizational "predicament" threatening geopolitical relevance, with large-scale immigration framed as unacceptable because it would produce a "fundamental transformation in the ethnic composition" of European societies (Demeny, 2003). Population aging is routinely cast as a crisis of "modernization" in which the elderly are positioned as fiscal burdens rather than contributors to social welfare (Coole, 2012). What these framings share is a tendency to present contestable political choices—about immigration, pension reform, labor market structure, and gender policy—as technical necessities flowing from demographic data, naturalizing pronatalist intervention in the process.

Empirical demographic evidence consistently fails to support the urgency these framings imply, yet these nuances rarely achieve the same political traction as crisis narratives. The selectivity with which demographic evidence is mobilized becomes most visible when pronatalist framing intersects with specific policy debates. Italy's record-low fertility was used to "fortify the political terrain," with the language of demographic emergency deployed to justify reviving traditional family norms and restricting

assisted reproduction to heterosexual married couples—policy choices with clear ideological content presented as rational demographic responses (Krause & Marchesi, 2007). In the U.S., Brady (2025) argues that demographic framing allows actors to present childbearing as a "duty to a national imagined community" and link childbearing to state power, economic growth, and cultural dominance. Fertility incentives have been optimized by identifying the most "cost-effective" population subgroups to target, treating biological reproduction as a domain of state investment to be managed for demographic returns (Chen, Lloyd, & Yip, 2018), while fertility decline has been attributed to young adults' misplaced attitudes or individual failure to manage reproductive timing. This frames structural problems as personal deficits and concentrating benefits on middle-class, heteronormative households (Siivonen & Castrén, 2026). In the United States, pronatalist policies have been explicitly framed as instruments for restoring a specific social order situated within a global resurgence of ethnonationalist politics (Perry & Grubbs, 2025). Across these cases, demographic evidence is not so much analyzed as it is recruited—selected and arranged to legitimate policy agendas whose real drivers lie in ideology, identity, and the politics of national belonging.

*Pronatalist Policies in the 20th and 21st Centuries*

The history of state intervention to promote increased fertility follows a broad arc reflecting changing relationships between state power, demographic knowledge, and political economy. The interwar period produced the most coercive expressions of pronatalist logic, rooted in explicitly eugenic frameworks distinguishing populations whose reproduction was to be encouraged from those to be curtailed or eliminated (Lovett, 2007; Quine, 1996). The post-war period brought formal repudiation of eugenic language but not its underlying logic (Lucassen, 2010; Sear, 2021). In the U.S. in the early 20$^{th}$ century, efforts to promote or prevent births by specific groups resulted in "Fitter Families" contests and targeted sterilization campaigns (Brady, 2025; Lovett, 2007; Roberts, 1998). Through the 1960s and into the 1980s, demographic concern shifted in much of the developing world toward overpopulation, and antinatalist policies proliferated alongside pronatalist programs in Europe. Antinatalist policies were reversed sharply once TFRs reached record lows, with governments subsequently enacting a range of policies seen to be pronatalist, ranging from coercive abortion bans to Nordic policies intended to provide universal childcare and improve gender equality (Bergsvik, Fauske, & Hart, 2021; Botev, 2015; Dumbrava, 2017: Kim, 2019; King, 2018; Mahmoodi, Mohammadpur, & Rezaei, 2015). In Romania, pronatalist policies focusing on child allowances and parental leave have primarily benefited middle-class families while marginalizing others, while Israel tied child allowances to veteran status in ways that structurally favored Jewish births over Arab ones—illustrating how the same policy instrument can selectively promote the reproductive lives the state considers desirable (King, 2002; Köksal, 2022).

The neoliberal turn of the 1980s and 1990s restructured rather than resolved this tension. The shift toward individual autonomy and economic deregulation—transferring risk from states and large employers to individuals—created conditions in which financial security and family formation came into direct conflict, driving period fertility downward in ways that cash transfers alone could not address (McDonald, 2006). The evidence on pronatalist policy effectiveness is strikingly consistent in its modesty: financial incentives tend to produce tempo effects—accelerating or delaying intended births—rather than durable increases in completed family size (Bergsvik, Fauske, & Hart, 2021; Validova, 2021). Significant financial incentive packages have proven highly sensitive to macroeconomic conditions, with fertility gains reversing rapidly when economic conditions deteriorate (Validova, 2021). Pronatalist programs in Russia, Poland, and Hungary produced significant but temporary increases in birth rates that were not sustained and failed to reverse demographic decline or reshape the conditions of women's lives (Cook, Iarskaia-Smirnova, & Kozlov, 2023). More recently in the U.S., the 2022 overturning of Roe v. Wade—a roll back of reproductive autonomy over abortion decisions—and expanded access to IVF for specific groups, have been seen as significant pronatalist interventions (Forati & Bartz, 2025; Brady, 2025).

No single policy reliably reverses low fertility; comprehensive and stable packages are required, and among individual interventions, public childcare shows the strongest and most durable evidence of positive fertility effects, while universal cash transfers tend to benefit wealthier families most and parental leave expansions show meaningful effects only when substantially large (Bergsvik et al., 2021; Sobotka, Matysiak, & Brzozowska, 2019). While family policies have a positive aggregate effect on fertility, the direct impact is modest, heavily dependent on national context, and most likely to succeed when framed around individual choice and gender equality rather than around demographic targets (Gauthier & Gietel-Basten, 2025).

In the late 2010s and early 2020s, pronatalism has become increasingly intertwined with conservative and ethnonationalist ideology. Aggressive cash-transfer programs under right-wing governments have been explicitly linked to conservative gender norms and ethnonationalist anxieties, their failure to produce sustained fertility increases reflecting the contradiction between pronatalist ambition and the absence of structural support for combining work and family life (Cook et al., 2023; King, 2018). Medical professionals have increasingly embraced pronatalist discourses as a strategy for re-establishing social authority within neoliberalized healthcare systems, repositioning themselves as mediators of the state's demographic project and extending population governance into the clinical encounter (Leykin & Rivkin-Fish, 2022). Pronatalist incentive structures concentrate benefits on those in secure middle-class employment and frame fertility decline as individual mismanagement rather than structural failure, reflecting neoliberal ambitions to reconstruct individual identities and behaviors in

service of sustained economic growth (Coole, 2012; Siivonen & Castrén, 2026). What runs through all of these cases is a persistent gap between pronatalist ambition and demonstrated effects—reflecting the fundamental mismatch between policies designed to hit demographic targets and the structurally embedded reasons people make reproductive decisions.

## Pronatalism as Ideology

Pronatalism refers to any set of attitudes, policies, or cultural norms that encourages higher fertility. But treating it purely as a demographic policy response obscures its more fundamental character as an ideology—a system of beliefs about who should reproduce, for what purposes, and in whose interest. Institutionalized pronatalism encompasses state-level policies and incentive structures designed to increase birth rates for economic or political ends, typically prioritizing the reproduction of certain "preferred" populations over others (Lee, 2024). Nationalist pronatalism—the promotion of fertility specifically to strengthen the nation and prevent its perceived decline—has dominated recent political discourse (Perry, McElroy, Schnabel, & Grubbs, 2022). Understood in these terms, pronatalism is not a response to a population problem but an expression of biopower: the state's will to manage reproductive life in the service of political projects that vary in content but share a common logic of population as resource (Foucault, 1997).

### *Ethno-Nationalist State Building*

Pronatalism has historically served as one of the primary instruments through which states pursue ethnonationalist projects, using the management of fertility to reproduce not just populations but a particular vision of national identity. The populations that pronatalist anxieties organize around are rarely populations in the abstract—they are implicitly or explicitly racially and culturally defined. It is not birth rates in general that concern the state, but the birth rates of the “right” kind of people. Calls for more children in countries like South Korea, Singapore, and various European nations are specifically calls for ethno-nationally defined children, designed to avoid "diluting" the population through immigration (Lee, 2024). These projects are typically rooted in top-down models of social control and exclusionary nationalism, frequently resting on historically racist or eugenic assumptions about the need for population replacement dressed in the neutral language of demographic necessity (Brown & Ferree, 2005; MacInnes & Diaz, 2007; Sear, 2021).

In the contemporary United States, pronatalist discourse constructs a dichotomous opposition between "mother citizens" and others, encouraging childbearing among White women as a civic duty while marginalizing groups perceived as demographic threats (Brady, 2025)—a pattern connected to the finding that the strongest predictors of nationalist pronatalist sentiment are patriarchal attitudes and the

belief that White and Christian Americans are the most discriminated-against groups (Perry et al., 2022). Across these cases, what appears as demographic governance consistently reveals itself as a political project: the selective reification of certain reproductive lives over others, authorized by the language of population science but organized by the imperatives of ethnic and cultural reproduction resulting in regimes of stratified reproduction wherever they are implemented (Colen, 1995).

### *Pronatalism and Anti-Immigration*

Pronatalism and anti-immigration politics are structurally linked in ways that reveal the ideological content beneath the demographic surface. That pronatalist actors consistently resist immigration as a policy solution is diagnostic: if the underlying concern were genuinely about population numbers, immigration would be an easier lever to move. The frequent rejection of increased immigration in favor of natalist incentives reveals that the real anxiety is not about population size but about population composition—about who constitutes the nation and whose biological reproduction secures its future. The demographic discourse of crisis and decline functions as a screen that obscures an ideological project organized around the character of the population rather than its quantity.

This pattern recurs across national contexts with striking consistency. Large-scale immigration has been explicitly framed as entailing a "fundamental transformation in the ethnic composition" of European societies—treating cultural homogeneity as a demographic value rather than an ideological preference (Demeny, 2003). The EU concept of social cohesion has been reframed in some national contexts to exclude immigrants, treating immigration not merely as an insufficient alternative but as an active threat to national identity (Krause & Marchesi, 2007). States with strong ethnic or cultural hegemony systematically favor pronatalist over immigration-based solutions precisely because immigration threatens the homogeneity they seek to preserve (Winckler, 2008). In its contemporary American expression, group-serving pronatalism operates from a zero-sum worldview in which high fertility among White Christians is framed as a civilizational strategy against the higher fertility of immigrants and political opponents (Perry & Grubbs, 2025). The simultaneous promotion of pronatalism for certain populations, alongside racialized targeting of birthright citizenship and mass deportations, is consistent with pronatalism being used as an ideological discourse to promote population composition rather than size (Brady, 2025). The consistent pairing of pronatalism with anti-immigration politics is not a contingent political coincidence but a structural feature of a worldview in which demographic governance is organized around the question of whose population deserves to grow.

### *Pronatalism, Patriarchy, and Traditional Gender Norms*

Pronatalist ideology is also, inescapably, a gender ideology. Because it assigns primary responsibility for demographic reproduction to women's bodies, pronatalism consistently operates by

constraining or directing women's reproductive choices in the service of collective political goals, and it resurfaces with particular intensity in contexts where women's labor force participation, educational attainment, and reproductive autonomy have expanded. Some governments avoid explicit pronatalist labels altogether, framing natalist interventions as tools for gender equality or work-life balance—simultaneously obscuring political intent and devaluing parental roles by subordinating them to demographic ends (Demeny, 2003; Hart & Holst, 2024).

At the level of media discourse, the gendered character of pronatalist ideology is less disguised: childless women are routinely characterized as selfish, lazy, or immoral, constructing voluntary childlessness as civic failure rather than legitimate personal choice (Brown & Ferree, 2005). In the United States, women's citizenship has become increasingly contingent on maternal status, with devolved reproductive healthcare producing highly variable geographic access while the nationalization of fetal rights has positioned women as vessels for fetal life rather than independent rights-bearing individuals (Rose, 2007)—a legal architecture connected to the Trump administration's codification of biological determinism into law and its framing of gender non-conforming identities as threats to motherhood (Brady, 2025).

The relationship between pronatalism and patriarchy is structural, and the policy evidence reflects this. Cash-transfer programs that do not challenge existing gender hierarchies show limited long-term effectiveness, while welfare initiatives that support more equitable redistribution of domestic labor have been associated with relatively higher fertility outcomes (King, 2018). Yet even arguments for gender equality as a fertility tool carry a troubling implication: they make women's rights contingent on their demographic utility, treating gender equality as a means to a national end rather than a value in its own right (King, 2018).

### *Pronatalism and White Christian Nationalism*

Contemporary pronatalism in the United States has taken on a distinctively religious and racial character. Christian nationalism—the project of centering conservative Christian identity in American civic life—is one of the strongest predictors of support for group-serving pronatalism, defined as the belief that childbearing is an instrumental act in service of social, religious, or political goals rather than personal fulfillment (Perry & Grubbs, 2025). Group-serving pronatalism encompasses four rationales: reversing national fertility decline, perpetuating religious heritage, perpetuating ethnic or racial heritage, and securing political influence (Perry & Grubbs, 2025). This ideological complex is not uniformly distributed: the link between Christian nationalism and pronatalism is most pronounced among White and Hispanic Americans and is significantly stronger among men than women, while being virtually nonexistent among Black Americans—underscoring how the demographic anxieties driving pronatalist

sentiment are racially as well as religiously structured (Perry et al., 2022). White nationalists and Christian nationalists use the idea of a fertility crisis among dominant groups to promote racial supremacy and elevate patriarchal social forms, and those most likely to view declining birth rates as harmful are disproportionately very conservative, religiously observant, dismissive of racism and climate change as social problems, and deeply concerned about immigration (Cohen, 2025).

In its most explicit political expression, this worldview converges with great replacement theory—a concept originating in extremist circles, mainstreamed through conservative media and political figures, and prior to the second Trump administration classified as a driver of domestic terrorism—which frames sub-replacement fertility among white populations as an existential assault (Farivar, 2022). Nationalist pronatalism in the United States is ultimately an imperative to accumulate the "right" kind of babies—an effort to establish a White, Christian social order in response to cultural and demographic change that deploys the neutral language of fertility decline to authorize what is, at its core, a project of racial and religious reproduction (Perry et al., 2022).

### Media Representation and Pronatalist Rhetoric

The ideological work of pronatalism is not confined to policy but is actively produced and circulated through media discourse, which constructs demographic decline as a cultural emergency and naturalizes the political responses that follow. News outlets do not merely reflect demographic reality but actively help construct it, legitimizing dominant ideologies about how individuals—particularly women—should manage their reproductive lives and translating statistical trends into moral imperatives (Georgiadis, 2011). This construction is made political from the outset: pronatalist media discourse frames failure to reproduce as "national suicide" threatening cultural survival, while the political leanings of outlets shape proposed solutions—with immigration treated as a viable policy in left-leaning outlets and rejected as a threat to "original identity" in conservative ones (Brown & Ferree, 2005). The effects of sustained pronatalist rhetoric are measurable: following widespread political propaganda urging women to have three children, ideal family size increased significantly in Turkey, religiosity became a meaningful predictor of desiring a third child where it had not been before, and sympathy for the governing party emerged as a major determinant of whether women found pronatalist demands fair—even as economic conditions prevented many from acting on those revised preferences (Dildar, 2022). Media functions as a key site through which demographic knowledge is translated into political common sense, shaping reproductive aspirations while leaving structural barriers unaddressed.

The digital media landscape has intensified this dynamic, enabling extreme interpretations of population decline to circulate at scale and blur the boundary between demographic concern and conspiratorial politics. Social media platforms have become echo chambers for populist pronatalist

rhetoric, conspiracy tropes linking fertility decline to vaccines, LGBTQ+ rights, and great replacement narratives (Gietel-Basten, 2023). Originating in extremist circles and mainstreamed through conservative media and political figures, great replacement theory frames sub-replacement fertility among White populations as existential assault rather than structural social outcome, and prior to the second Trump administration was classified as a driver of domestic terrorism (Farivar, 2022). In the contemporary United States this rhetoric has achieved unprecedented institutional reach: the idea that underpopulation is civilization's greatest threat has been promoted by prominent public figures, high-ranking officials have publicly demeaned childfree women, and a president has styled himself the "fertilization president" while simultaneously pursuing mass deportations and characterizing disability as a societal burden (Brady, 2025; Gietel-Basten, 2023). Across all of these registers—policy, professional expertise, and media—demographic discourse does not neutrally describe population trends but actively produces a political common sense about whose reproduction matters, whose is threatening, and what the state is therefore justified in doing about it.

The evidence reviewed here converges on a central argument: pronatalist discourse is not a measured response to demographic reality but an ideological project that deploys the authority of population science selectively in the service of political commitments organized around nationalism, patriarchy, religion, and race. If this argument is correct, a testable implication follows—one that has received surprisingly little direct empirical attention. If media coverage of pronatalism were genuinely driven by demographic concern, we would expect its volume and tone to track actual fertility trends, rising and falling in response to real changes in birth rates across the population groups most central to pronatalist anxiety. If media coverage of pronatalist themes instead functions as ideological framing independent of demographic reality, we would expect coverage to be decoupled from fertility trends—produced by political and cultural dynamics that precede the empirical conditions they purport to describe. This study tests that implication directly, examining whether age- and race-specific changes in fertility rates among women, aged 18 to 44, predict the volume or tone of online news coverage across conservative, progressive, and neutral outlets for four pronatalism-adjacent themes—fertility rates, population and demographic change, aging populations, and maternal and reproductive health—over the period January 2017 through December 2022. The null findings that emerge—that neither volume nor tone across outlet types is predicted by actual fertility trends, for any age or racial group examined—are precisely what the ideological account developed here would lead us to expect, and provide quantitative support for the theoretical claim that demographic discourse functions as a regime of truth organized around political imperatives.

## Data and Methods

*Data*

Race & Age-Specific Fertility Rates

To test this argument, we begin by constructing race/ethnicity and age-specific fertility rates for each month in the years 2017-2022 (the years that the GDELT database and CDC Wonder database of births overlap) for non-Hispanic White, non-Hispanic Black, and Hispanic women aged 18-24, 25-34, and 35-44 (ACS, 2025; CDC, 2025). We then calculate the monthly change in each race/ethnicity-specific and age-specific fertility rate and generate a 13-month moving average of these changes. This 13-month window accounts for the delay between the end of the administrative year and the average release date by the CDC of birth data (CDC, 2025), and is sensitive to specifications that account for the range of release delays over the period examined. We use a moving average of the fertility change rather than a lag to characterize the general trend in the group-specific fertility rates over the last 13 months, under the assumption that if fertility changes are negative, and if the media coverage is linked to empirical changes in population patterns, this trend would be reflected in media coverage. Figures 1 shows the race/ethnicity & age-specific fertility trends over the period under examination (all trend figures are lowess-smoothed to account for some of the seasonality in fertility rates).

Media Articles on Fertility-Related Themes

To account for the salience of fertility-related subjects in media outlets, we rely on data from the Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone (GDELT). GDELT is a massive open-source inventory of global media with a coverage of 65 languages in real-time. GDELT also offers translation, language processing, tone and sentiment analysis tools to analyze the data (GDELT, 2015). News articles included in the GDELT database are subject to various methods of content analysis, which runs news articles through a large collection of dictionaries, taxonomies and linguistic pattern-matching systems to identify themes, concepts, and issue areas present in the articles. When words or phrases in a given news article match entries in the collection of dictionaries, the corresponding theme codes are attached to the article by the GDELT Global Content Analysis Measures (GCAM) system. Similarly, the identification of positive-negative tones of news articles are also enabled by the GDELT Global Content Analysis Measures (GCAM) system as part of its language processing methods (The GDELT Project, 2014).

In this study, we use themes related to pro-natalism from the GDELT Global Knowledge Graph (GKG) codebook, that are defined using the World Bank Development Data Group Taxonomy—an encyclopedic classification system developed by the World Bank to categorize topics across a large range of domains. This is an internal topic classification system used by the World Bank and adopted by

GDELT to supplement its thematic classifications (GDELT, 2015). The selected themes include "Fertility Rate" (classification WB_2662), "Population and Demographic Change" (classification WB_640), "Aging Population" (classification WB_643), and "Reproductive and Maternal Health" (classification WB_641) (GDELT, 2015). Using the *gdeltr2* package (Bresler, A., 2019) in R, we collect two main types of data; (i) article counts for each outlet and the matching themes (*TimelineVolRaw*) and (ii) average tone of the articles in each media outlet and the matching themes (*TimelineTone*). We set the source country as the United States and the language as English.

We then pull article volume and tone data from 23 online news outlets from GDELT for the four pre-defined themes related to pronatalist discourse (Leetaru & Schrodt, 2013). We define the news outlets for inclusion by using the full list of 30 media outlets used in the 165th wave of the American Trends Panel, conducted by the Pew Research Center (2025, See Appendix 1 for full list). These outlets were selected based on their reach and breadth with the American public (Pew Research Center, 2025). We were able to include 23 of the 30 media outlets; sources were excluded because they were based in the U.K. (n=3), were not online media outlets (n=2), or were Spanish-language outlets (n=2). We then define each media outlet as conservative, progressive, or neutral based on the bias rating assigned to them by the Ad Fontes Media Content Analysis (Otero, von Wald, Fox-Ramirez, & Heldebrandt, 2025). For each group of media outlets (conservative, progressive, and neutral) and for each of the four pre-defined pronatalist themes (fertility, population change, aging, and reproductive health), we pull the number of articles per month from January 2017-December 2022 and the average tone for each month (Leetaru & Schrodt, 2013).

We transform the number of articles per month into a rate per 10,000 articles for each type of outlet and each theme (see Figure 2). These are our first set of outcome variables. The rate of articles varies by the pronatalist theme, the month and year, and the political bias of the outlet. The tone data uses GDELT's proprietary Natural Language Processing models to generate negative or positive values linked to the emotional valence words in an individual article (GDELT, 2015). This process assigns words a value based on expert pre-defined sentiment to generate a sum of positive and negative values per article, and then assigns the article an overall score by subtracting the negative score from the positive scores. Overall negative scores are used to indicate a negative tone and overall positive scores are used to indicate positive tones. GDELT indicates that the scores range from -100 (extremely negative) to 100 (extremely positive), with most values falling in between -10 and 10 (GDELT, 2015).

Because news outlets in general tend to have overall positive tones, we transform these monthly values into Z-score deviations from the average value for the entire type of outlet (i.e., the values in Figure 3 represent the standard deviations of the tone of articles from conservative outlets from the overall tone in conservative outlets). These represent our second set of outcome variables. While all tone

Z-scores demonstrate some variation, there are several notable patterns. Relative to the average tone of conservative articles, articles about pronatalist themes in conservative outlets tend to have mostly positive tones; the degree of this positiveness greatly increases after the election of the Biden administration. For both the 'fertility rate' and 'population and demographic change' themes, progressive news outlets have relatively stable tones over time, hovering around balanced or slightly positive; however in the election year leading up to Biden's presidency, they demonstrate more negative tones relative to the average progressive article. Neutral outlets primarily have balanced or moderately positive tones over the entire observation period.

*Analytic Strategy*

We begin by describing the trends and patterns in our outcome and predictor variables in the results section. To assess whether media coverage of pronatalist themes are related to changes in fertility rates, we then run a linear regression model of the month-year article publication rate, stratified by the political bias of media outlets, for each of the four GDELT themes on the 13-month moving average change in age-specific fertility rates using year fixed-effects (see Table 1). We do not include month fixed-effects in our models as the 13-month moving average is designed to smooth out seasonal variation in fertility changes and month fixed-effects would absorb this variation; we are intentionally choosing a parsimonious model that does not over-control for seasonality. In our next sets of models we run models for each of the four GDELT themes on age-specific changes in fertility rates (Figure 4a) and on race/ethnicity-specific changes in fertility rates (Figure 4b). Our final set of analyses regresses the average Z-score for article tone on the same sets of variables (first age-specific changes in fertility and then race/ethnicity-specific changes in fertility, both with year fixed-effects; Figures 5a-b).

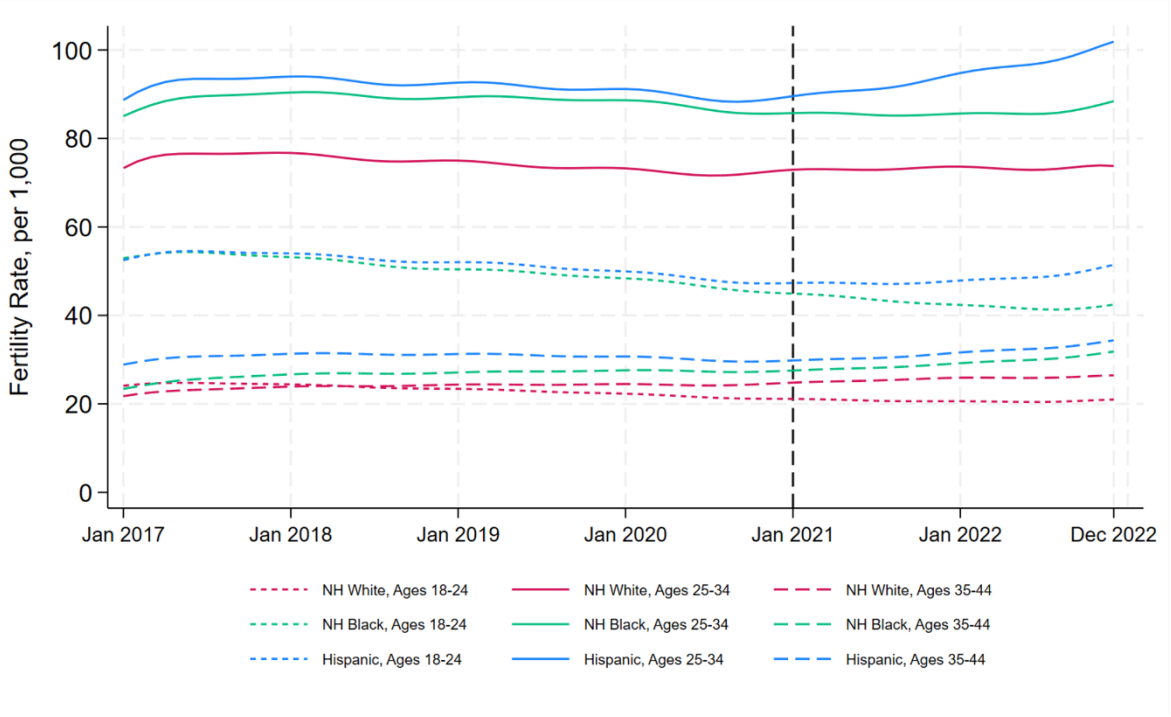
## Results

*Descriptive Patterns in Article Volume and Tone*

Figure 1 displays the race/ethnicity- and age-specific fertility rates over the 2017–2022 period. Several consistent patterns emerge across all three state types. Across all race/ethnicity groups, the 25-34 year olds consistently have the highest fertility rates over this period. Over the 2017-2020 period, fertility rates in these groups remain relatively stable or decline slightly. Following the 2020 election cycle, 25-34 year-old Hispanic women experience a clear increase in fertility rates, while non-Hispanic Black and White women's fertility appears to stabilize or slightly increase. For non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic women, fertility rates among 18-24 year-olds are relatively high over this period but persistently decline from 2017 to 2020. After the Biden administration entered office, 18-24 year-old non-Hispanic Black women continue to experience fertility decline, but 18-24 year old Hispanic women experience a slight

fertility increase. Fertility rates among 18-24 year-old non-Hispanic White women begin the period at less than half the level of 18-24 year-olds from other race/ethnicity groups; by the end of the observation period the gap between non-Hispanic Black women and non-Hispanic White women in this age group has shrunk. Across all race/ethnicity groups, the fertility of women aged 35-44 is the lowest of all age groups in 2017; by 2018, non-Hispanic White women have experienced a cross-over between women aged 18-24 and those aged 35-44. Among 35-44 year olds, we can observe small but persistent increases in fertility rates over the 2017-2022 period, with a slight acceleration following 2020.

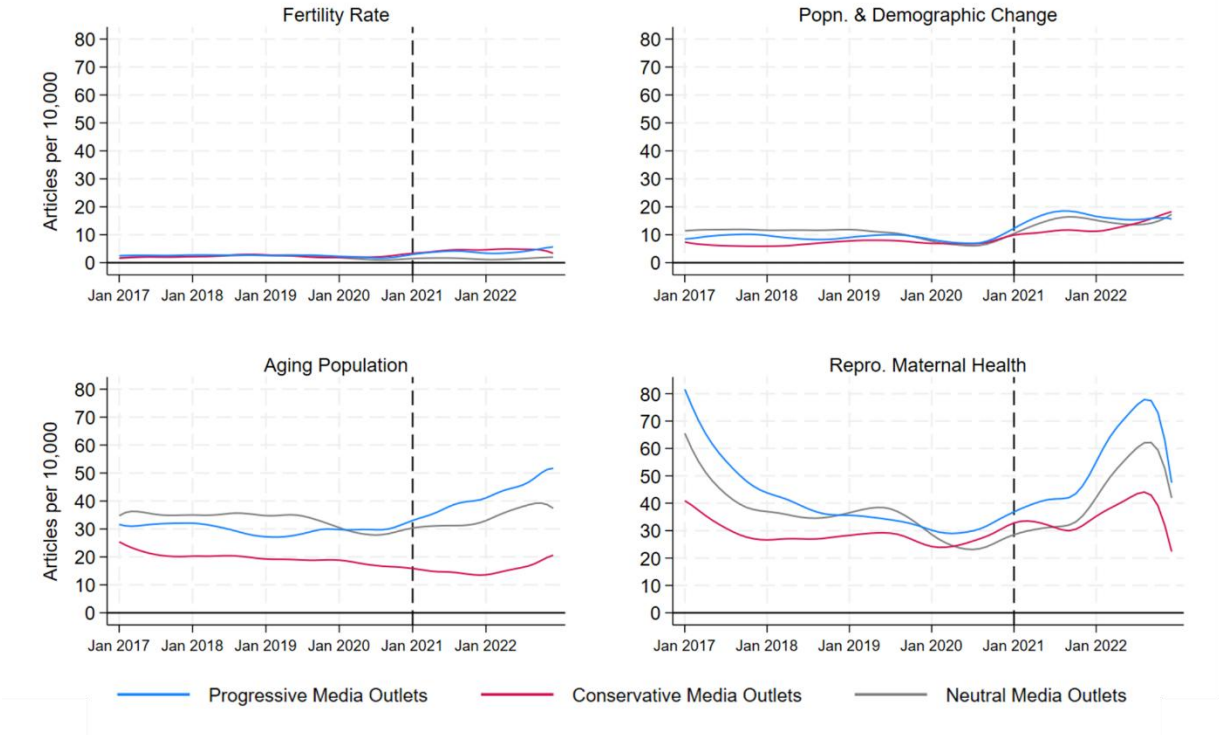
**Figure 1 Race/ethnicity & Age-specific Fertility Rates, 2017-2022**




Before turning to the regression analyses, we first describe the raw patterns in article volume and tone across outlet types and themes over the 2017–2022 period (Figures 2 and 3). Article rates per 10,000 vary substantially across themes. Standardized coverage of the theme ‘Fertility Rate’ is relatively sparse, remaining near zero throughout the observation window across all outlet types, with only a slight uptick visible toward the end of 2022. Articles on the theme ‘Population and Demographic Change’ are similarly low in volume at the start of the period but show a modest upward trend beginning around 2020–2021, with progressive outlets leading this increase. By contrast, articles covering the themes of ‘Aging Population’ and ‘Reproductive and Maternal Health’ are considerably higher-volume themes. ‘Aging Population’ coverage is relatively stable across the period, hovering between roughly 20 and 50 articles per 10,000 depending on outlet type, with progressive outlets consistently producing the highest rates and conservative outlets the lowest. ‘Reproductive and Maternal Health’ articles have the highest-volume

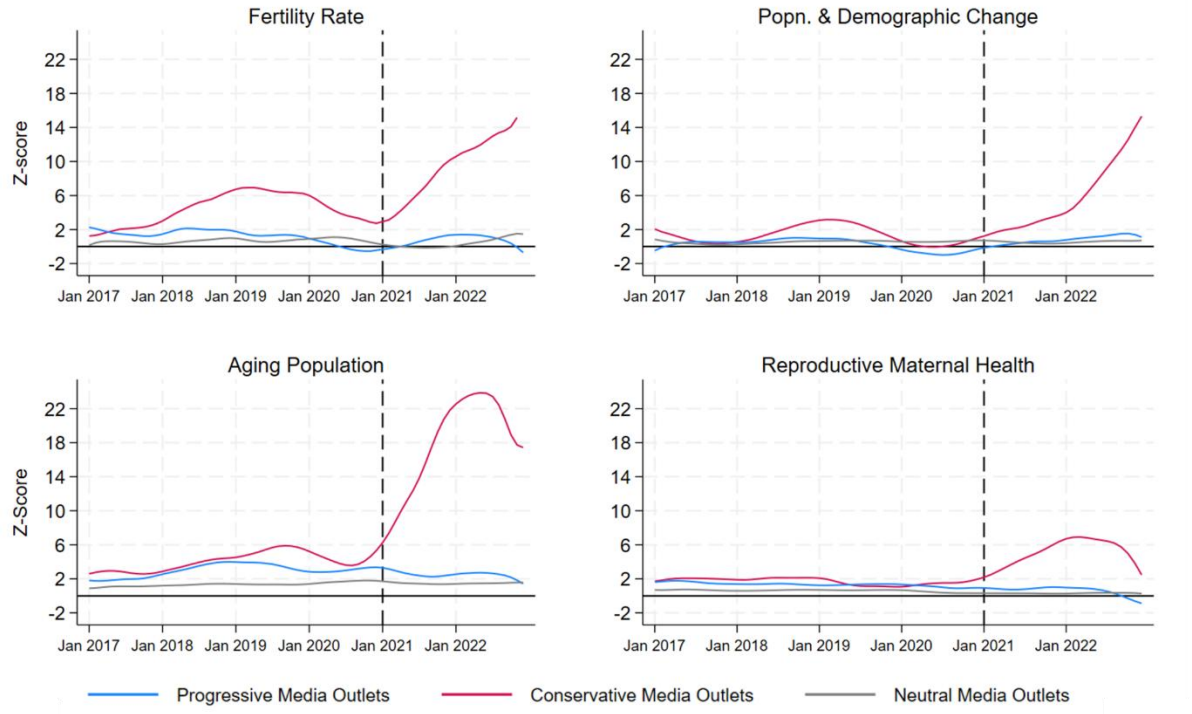
theme coverage overall, but shows a pronounced dip across all outlet types around 2019–2020 before recovering sharply—particularly in progressive and neutral outlets—through 2022, likely reflecting the renewed salience of reproductive policy in the lead-up to and aftermath of the Dobbs decision.

**Figure 2 GDELT Article Rates, per 10,000, by Political Bias & Theme, 2017-2022**




The tone patterns in Figure 3 are more striking. Across all four themes, conservative outlets (shown in red) diverge sharply from progressive and neutral outlets beginning around 2020–2021, with tone z-scores rising dramatically—in some cases exceeding 10 to 20 standard deviations above the average conservative article tone. This shift is most pronounced for the themes of 'Fertility Rate', 'Population and Demographic Change', and 'Aging Population', where conservative outlet tone climbs steeply following the 2020 presidential election of Biden and continues rising through 2022. It is worthwhile to note that, in general, the tone scores for news outlets is largely negative. The increase in standard deviations for the conservative outlets shown here indicates primarily that the articles on these themes were more positive than other topics during the Biden administration, not that they were positive overall. This could indicate that these themes were, in fact, considered areas for positive discourse among conservative outlets, or, alternatively, could indicate that other coverage in these outlets was profoundly more negative. Progressive and neutral outlets, by contrast, remain close to their average tones throughout the observation period, generally hovering between approximately −2 and +2 standard deviations, with slight negative dips observable in progressive outlets around 2019–2020 (the election year) for the 'fertility rate' and 'population and demographic change' themes. These descriptive patterns strongly

**Figure 3 GDELT Z-scores of Article Tone, by Political Bias & Theme, 2017-2022**




suggest that the pronounced positivity of pronatalist discourse in conservative outlets over this period is driven primarily by the political and electoral context rather than by empirical changes in fertility rates—a hypothesis the regression analyses below directly test.

*Empirical Demographic Patterns and Media Volume of Pronatalist Themes*

We begin by examining whether changes in age- and race/ethnicity-specific fertility rates over the prior 13 months predict the rate of pronatalism-related articles per 10,000 articles across conservative, progressive, and neutral outlets. Overall, we find no evidence that empirical changes in fertility rates drive media coverage volume on any of the four GDELT themes. As shown in Table 1, in pooled models that do not stratify by age or race/ethnicity, none of the associations between the 13-month moving average of fertility change and article rates reach statistical significance.

The direction of the pooled coefficients nonetheless follows some interpretable patterns. Increases in fertility over the prior 13 months are–though non-significant–associated with more articles on the GDELT themes 'Fertility Rate' and 'Reproductive and Maternal Health' across the political bias of the outlets. There is a non-significant, but inverse relationship between increases in fertility over the prior 13 months and article rates on 'Aging Population,' suggesting that rising fertility could modestly dampen media coverage of population aging. Only for the theme 'Population and Demographic Change' does the direction of the relationship between fertility increases and the article rate change across different political types of media outlets. Although non-significant, for both progressive and neutral outlets, the relationship

with fertility increases over the prior 13 months is positive, while the coefficient is negative within conservative outlets.

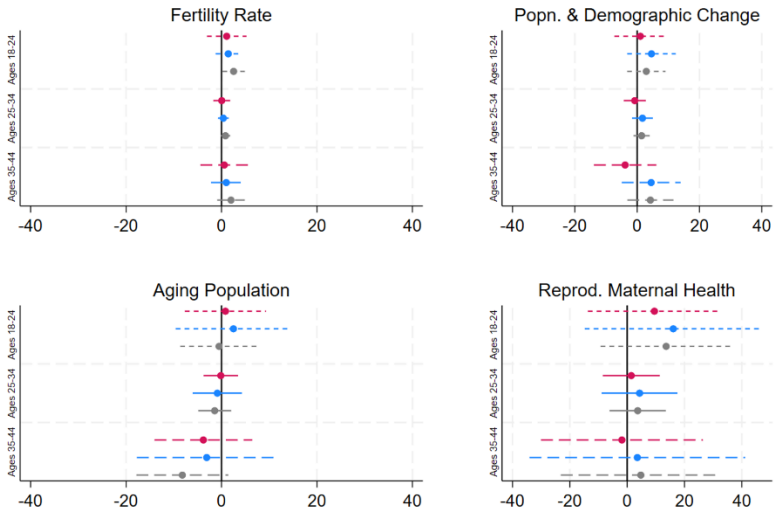
**Table 1 Association between Article Rate for GDELT Themes and change in Fertility Rate**

| coefficient (SE) | Progressive Media Outlets | Conservative Media Outlets | Neutral Media Outlets |
|---|---|---|---|
| Fertility Rate | 0.250 (0.321) | 0.110 (0.502) | 0.504 (0.287) |
| Population & Demographic Change | 1.008 (0.945) | -0.342 (1.007) | 0.817 (0.742) |
| Aging Population | -0.281 (1.468) | -0.148 (1.030) | -0.817 (0.981) |
| Reproductive & Maternal Health | 2.515 (3.757) | 0.964 (2.827) | 2.206 (2.788) |
| Year fixed effects | X | X | X |
| Observations | 72 | 72 | 72 |

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

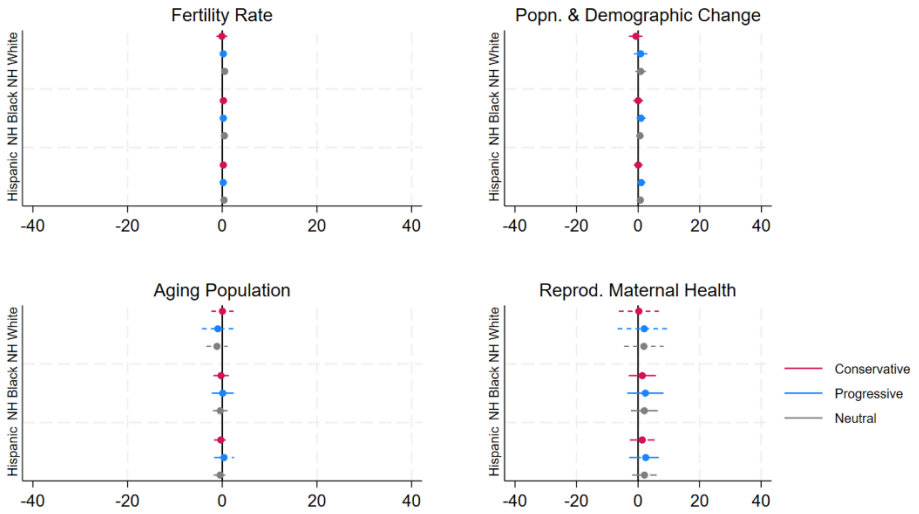
Stratifying models by age-specific fertility changes (Figure 4a) or by race/ethnicity-specific fertility changes (Figure 4b) does not reveal any statistically significant associations between fertility change and article volume. Several descriptive tendencies are nonetheless worth noting. For the 'Fertility Rate' and 'Population and Demographic Change' themes, increases in both age-specific and race/ethnicity-specific fertility are associated with higher article rates in progressive and neutral outlets across all groups, while conservative outlets show a more variable pattern. We can see this variation in two examples: for increases in fertility among women aged 35–44 and for increases in non-Hispanic White women's fertility, the coefficient turns negative for the 'Population and Demographic Change' theme in conservative outlets, although this finding is not significant. For the 'Aging Population' theme, fertility increases among women aged 35–44 are associated with lower article rates across all outlet types, and a similar pattern holds for non-Hispanic White and non-Hispanic Black women in neutral outlets and for non-Hispanic White women in progressive outlets (all associations non-significant). Coefficients for the 'Reproductive and Maternal Health' theme are poorly estimated across all subgroups and outlet types, with wide confidence intervals that preclude any meaningful interpretation of directionality.

**Figure 4a Association of Article Rate of GDELT Themes with change in Age-specific Fertility Rates, by Political Bias of Media Outlet**




All coefficients cross the x-axis at x=0

**Figure 4b Association of Article Rate of GDELT Themes with change in Race-specific Fertility Rates, by Political Bias of Media Outlet**




All coefficients shown cross the x-axis at x=0

*Empirical Demographic Patterns and Media Tone of Pronatalist Themes*

Turning to media tone, we examine whether changes in fertility rates predict whether articles about pronatalist themes are more positive or negative relative to the average tone of each outlet type, measured as a Z-score deviation. As shown in Table 2, in pooled models that examine the article tone across themes and types of media outlets, the significance of our findings remains largely the same, with one main exception: fertility increases over the prior 13 months are significantly associated with more positive article tones in progressive media outlets when the articles are on reproductive and maternal health ($p<.010$). There is more variation in the tones across themes and types of media outlets than there is for the article rates. For articles on the 'Fertility Rate' theme, progressive and neutral media outlets have more positive tones relative to other articles in the same outlets, while conservative news media have more negative tones. Increases in fertility rates over the previous 13 months have more positive tones for articles on 'Population and Demographic Change' and on 'Reproductive and Maternal Health' in progressive outlets but more negative tones in conservative and media outlets. One notable item is that the coefficients for the neutral media outlet tones tend to be the closest to zero across each theme; this offers an important check that the political categorizations are demonstrating different emotional valences according to their bias. Finally, for articles on 'Aging Population', increases in fertility rates are associated with negative tone for progressive and neutral outlets, and associated with positive tone for conservative outlets.

**Table 2 Association between Article Tone for GDELT Themes and change in Fertility Rate**

| coefficient (SE) | Progressive Media Outlets | Conservative Media Outlets | Neutral Media Outlets |
|---|---|---|---|
| Fertility Rate | 0.635<br>(0.450) | -0.835<br>(1.195) | 0.290<br>(0.302) |
| Population & Demographic Change | 0.478<br>(0.391) | -0.699<br>(0.989) | -0.042<br>(0.123) |
| Aging Population | -0.095<br>(0.353) | 1.827<br>(1.750) | -0.103<br>(0.111) |
| Reproductive & Maternal Health | 0.677**<br>(0.255) | -0.274<br>(0.621) | -0.026<br>(0.082) |
| Year fixed effects | X | X | X |
| Observations | 72 | 72 | 72 |

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

As shown in Figures 5a and 5b, the results are again largely non-significant, but a clearer and more consistent pattern of directional differences by outlet type emerges here than in the article rate models—and one notable significant finding does appear. For the 'Fertility Rate' theme, increases in age-specific and race/ethnicity-specific fertility over the prior 13 months are associated with more positive tone in progressive and neutral outlets and more negative tone in conservative outlets across all groups, though none of these associations reach statistical significance (Figures 5a and 5b). For the theme on

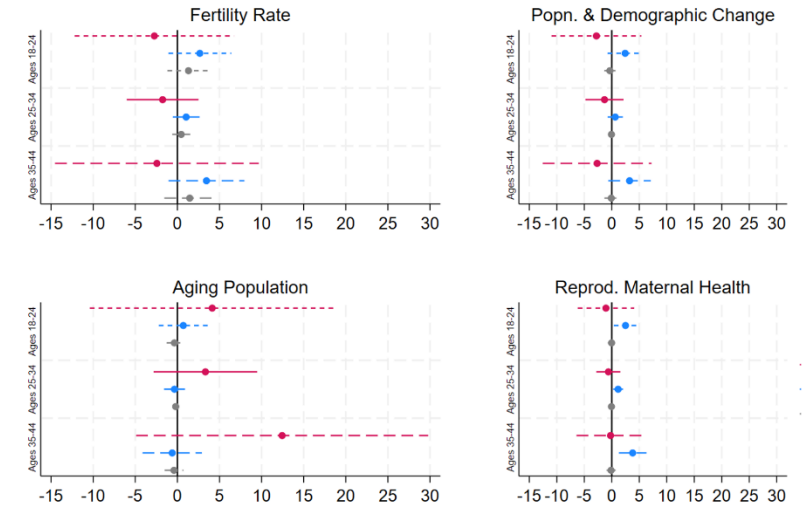
‘Population and Demographic Change’, a similar divergence by outlet type is observed: fertility increases among women aged 18–24 and 35–44 are associated with more positive tones in progressive outlets, while the association is negative across all age groups in conservative outlets. When disaggregated by race/ethnicity, increases in fertility across all groups are associated with more positive tones in progressive outlets and more negative tones in conservative outlets, consistent with the age-specific pattern (all findings are non-significant). For the ‘Aging Population’ theme, increases in fertility across all age groups are associated with more positive tones in conservative outlets—the opposite directional pattern from the ‘Fertility Rate’ and ‘Population and Demographic Change’ themes—though these associations remain non-significant.

The most notable finding in the tone analyses concerns the ‘Reproductive and Maternal Health’ theme. Increases in fertility among women aged 25–34 and 35–44 over the prior 13 months are significantly associated with more positive tone in progressive outlets specifically, with no comparable significant associations in conservative or neutral outlets (Figure 5a). This finding holds in the race/ethnicity-stratified models: increases in fertility among all racial and ethnic groups are significantly associated with more positive tone in progressive outlets for reproductive and maternal health coverage, with the largest magnitude observed for non-Hispanic White women (Figure 5b). Conservative and neutral outlets show no significant tone response to fertility changes for this theme.

## Discussion and Conclusion

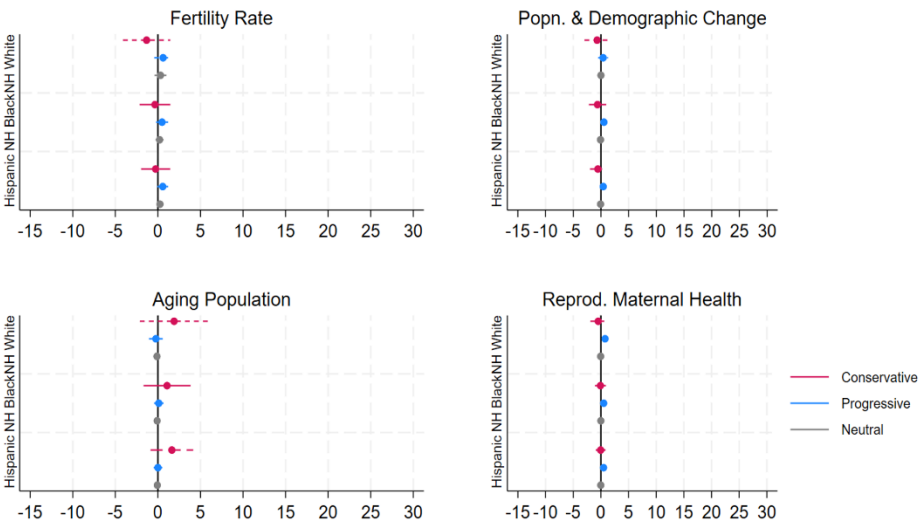
The aim of this study is to test whether there is a significant relationship between fertility trends and the volume and tone of thematic news coverage related to pronatalist topics across politically distinct media outlets in the U.S. Measures of positive and negative tone are a simple approach in content analysis, although useful to analyze how the message of the text is communicated. Drawing on these measures, and on birth and census data alongside the GDELT media database, we find that the answer to whether changes in fertility are related to media coverage of pronatalist topics is largely no. Across all four thematic categories—fertility rate, population and demographic change, aging population, and reproductive and maternal health—changes in fertility rates over the prior 13 months do not significantly predict article rates in conservative, progressive, or neutral outlets. With one notable exception discussed below, the same pattern holds for tone. These null findings are themselves theoretically meaningful—the absence of a significant relationship between demographic change and media coverage lends empirical support to a growing body of scholarship arguing that pronatalist discourse is not primarily a response to observable population dynamics, but rather an ideological project that selectively mobilizes the authority of demographic science in service of broader political, nationalist, and patriarchal agendas (Foucault, 1978; King, 2018). If coverage of fertility-related themes were driven by actual fertility trends, we would

**Figure 5a Association of Article Tone for GDELT Themes with change in Age-specific Fertility Rates, by Political Bias of Media Outlet**




Positive values indicate positive tone & vice versa

**Figure 5b Association of Article Tone for GDELT Themes with change in Race-specific Fertility Rates, by Political Bias of Media Outlet**




Positive values indicate positive tone & vice versa
All coefficients cross the x-axis at x=0

we would expect to observe a patterned relationship between changes in period fertility rates and article volume or valence. Instead of finding this relationship, we find that the most pronounced shifts in coverage patterns—particularly the sharp divergence in tone among conservative outlets following the 2020 presidential election—appear to be driven by the political context of the moment rather than by any underlying fertility patterns. That conservative outlets became markedly more positive in their coverage of the themes we examined *after* the Biden administration took office, despite no corresponding shift in fertility rates, suggests that pronatalism could be functioning as a form of oppositional political discourse rather than a genuine policy response to population change.

The one significant finding in our analyses demonstrated that increases in fertility rates over the prior 13 months are significantly associated with a more positive tone in progressive media coverage of reproductive and maternal health. Several mechanisms may explain this association. First, increases in fertility may generate authentic demand for reproductive and maternal health services and policies. This increased demand may be covered more favorably by progressive outlets, thus producing the significantly positive tone. Second, and perhaps more plausible given the time period under study, the tone of progressive coverage on reproductive and maternal health may be capturing political response to shifting administrative priorities across two presidential administrations with sharply divergent positions on reproductive rights (Brown & Feree, 2005; Georgiadis, 2011; Perry & Grubbs, 2025). Under this interpretation, the reproductive and maternal health theme is serving as a proxy for the broader political climate around reproductive policy rather than as a direct response to fertility trends. Third, it is possible that GDELT's natural language processing–based theme classification is capturing a broader and more heterogeneous set of articles than intended under the reproductive and maternal health theme, and may not be capturing the pronatalist rhetoric we intended to measure. Although prior validation work comparing GDELT's theme classification to much larger repositories suggests that it performs very well in capturing the corpus of articles for specific themes, this limitation cannot be fully ruled out (GDELT, 2015).

Although our findings were largely non-significant, the descriptive patterns we discuss may be indicative of persistent associations in longer time series. Conservative media outlets consistently produce fewer articles on aging population and reproductive and maternal health themes and show the most volatile tone trajectories over the study period, while progressive outlets produce higher rates of coverage on these same topics and maintain more stable tones. These differences are consistent with the ideological landscape of contemporary U.S. pronatalism, in which conservative discourse has increasingly coupled concerns about fertility decline with ethnonationalist and anti-immigration framings, while progressive outlets engage more directly with reproductive rights and structural determinants of fertility (Brown & Feree, 2025; Brady, 2025). The period following the 2020 election appears to be a critical inflection point

in these diverging trajectories, a finding that reinforces the conclusion that political context—not demographic reality—is the primary driver of pronatalist media discourse.

*Limitations*

Several limitations of this analysis should inform how these findings are interpreted and extended. The study period spans only two presidential administrations, constraining the temporal variation available for analysis and making it difficult to disentangle the effects of fertility change from those of broader political cycles. The GDELT data provide measures of article volume and aggregate tone, but not the substantive content of articles; it is therefore not possible to assess directly whether coverage invokes anti-immigration sentiment, racial ideology, or patriarchal framing, even though these are theoretically central to the pronatalist project as we have characterized it. Although outside the scope of this analysis, more complex sentiment analyses of news articles related to pronatalism subjects in future studies could further our understanding on pronatalist ideologies and propaganda. The restriction of the analysis to national-level outlets, necessitated by insufficient article counts in local and Spanish-language media, also limits generalizability and forecloses the possibility of examining geographic variation in coverage patterns. Future research would benefit from sentiment and content analyses of article titles and full texts, term-based rather than theme-based filtering approaches, and stratification by state-level political characteristics and voting history to capture the subnational dimensions of pronatalist discourse.

*Conclusion*

Taken together, these findings contribute to a growing interdisciplinary literature on the relationship between demographic knowledge and political ideology. They suggest that the apparent empirical grounding of pronatalist rhetoric—its frequent invocation of fertility statistics, dependency ratios, and population projections—should not be mistaken for evidence that such discourse is genuinely responsive to demographic change. Rather, pronatalism in contemporary U.S. media appears to function as a durable ideological frame that deploys the language of population science selectively, in ways that are shaped more by electoral politics, nationalist mobilization, and contest over reproductive rights than by the underlying demographic trends it ostensibly describes. Understanding this disconnect between demographic evidence and political discourse is essential for evaluating pronatalist policy proposals on their merits, and for anticipating the conditions under which such proposals are likely to gain or lose political traction.

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## Appendix 1 List of Media Outlets Included in GDELT Pull by Year, Month, and Political Bias

| Outlet | % Americans regularly get news from[1] | Bias Rating Ad Fontes | Mean Article Rate, Fertility Rate Theme | Mean Article Rate, Combined Themes | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| abcnews.go.com | 36% | Balanced | 1.239 | 62.557 | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. |
| apnews.com | 21% | Balanced | 1.555 | 70.444 | -- | Apr. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. |
| theatlantic.com | 5% | Skews Left | 7.684 | 173.649 | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. |
| axios.com | 3% | Balanced | 9.377 | 69.498 | -- | Apr. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Mar. |
| breitbart.com | 3% | Strong Right | 6.605 | 82.238 | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. |
| cbsnews.com | 30% | Balanced | 0.865 | 67.568 | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. |
| cnn.com | 33% | Skews Left | 2.873 | 87.466 | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. - Aug. |
| foxnews.com | 38% | Skews Right | 0.999 | 47.116 | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. |
| forbes.com | 9% | Balanced | 2.396 | 111.203 | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. |
| thehill.com | 5% | Balanced | 2.074 | 67.192 | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – May. |
| huffingtonpost.com | 5% | Skews Left | 3.158 | 145.044 | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| msnbc.com | 22% | Skews Left | 0.122 | 15.894 | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. |
| nbcnews.com | 35% | Balanced | 2.810 | 101.185 | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. |
| newsmax.com | 8% | Strong Right | 3.199 | 81.398 | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan.-Feb. | -- |
| newsweek.com | 8% | Balanced | 2.890 | 81.423 | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. |
| npr.org | 20% | Balanced | 1.777 | 97.256 | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. |
| nypost.com | 9% | Skews Right | 1.130 | 39.365 | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan.- June | -- | -- |
| nytimes.com | 19% | Skews Left | 3.273 | 108.288 | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. |
| pbs.org | 21% | Balanced | 2.612 | 138.735 | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. |
| politico.com | 8% | Balanced | 0.699 | 128.786 | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. |
| usatoday.com | 13% | Balanced | 1.397 | 68.117 | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. |
| wsj.com | 13% | Balanced | 2.426 | 50.618 | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Mar. |
| washingtonpost.com | 12% | Skews Left | 2.580 | 78.581 | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. | Jan. – Dec. |

*all online media outlets selected from the Pew Research Center's study on "The Political Gap in American News Sources" (2025); the following sources are not included: BBC, The Guardian, and The Daily Wire (because of UK origin); Telemundo and Univision (because the GDELT program does not translate Spanish language programming for their themes); and the Tucker Carlson Network and The Joe Rogan Experience (because these are only available in television or podcast formats).