

# Public Opinion on Birthright Citizenship in the United States: Supportive Overall, Increasingly Divided by Party

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## KEY FINDINGS

- **Public support for birthright citizenship has remained broadly stable since the mid-1990s, with a notable increase in recent years.**

When first measured in the early 1990s, public support for maintaining birthright citizenship fell just short of a majority (48%). It then grew to a clear but not overwhelming majority in the mid-1990s (57%) and remained at that level for more than two decades. Since 2020, support has consistently been in the mid-60% range.

- **Partisan differences have widened substantially.**

Democrats have become increasingly supportive of birthright citizenship—rising to above 80% in recent years. Republican support has been more variable but, on balance, is similar today to its level in the early 1990s. As a result, the partisan gap now stands at roughly 45 percentage points.

- **Support declines with distance from the immigrant experience.**

First- and second-generation Americans are consistently more supportive of maintaining birthright citizenship than third- and fourth-generation Americans.

- **Racial and ethnic differences are evident but closely tied to partisanship and immigration background.**

Hispanic and black Americans are generally more supportive of birthright citizenship than white Americans. These differences narrow, however—and in some cases reverse—after accounting for party affiliation. Among Democrats, racial differences have declined over time as support among white Democrats has increased.

- **Awareness of birthright citizenship is high, but knowledge of its constitutional basis is uneven and politically divided.**

While most Americans are aware of the policy of birthright citizenship, fewer understand that it is rooted in the Constitution, and knowledge varies substantially by party. Further, experimental evidence shows that explicitly referencing the Constitution in the survey question has little to no effect on support for the policy.

## INTRODUCTION

Birthright citizenship has been the subject of political and legal debate, particularly in the context of immigration policy. In the United States, citizenship is based on *Jus Soli* (“right of the soil”)—the principle that nearly all individuals born on U.S. soil are automatically granted citizenship, as established by the Fourteenth Amendment. In much of the world, however, citizenship is determined by *Jus Sanguinis* (“right of blood”), where status is based on parentage.

The question of which of these principles should guide citizenship in the United States has taken on renewed importance. On April 1, 2026, the U.S. Supreme Court heard oral argument in a landmark case challenging a Trump administration executive order seeking to restrict birthright citizenship. The case raises fundamental questions about the scope of the Fourteenth Amendment and could reshape how citizenship is defined in the United States.

Against this backdrop, understanding public opinion on birthright citizenship is especially important. Survey data going back to the early 1990s provide a basis for assessing Americans’ views on the subject over time. Have attitudes shifted, or have they remained stable? And to what extent are these views shaped by partisan identity, social experience, and constitutional knowledge?

This data brief examines these questions using a combination of long-run survey trends, subgroup analyses, and experimental evidence. Drawing on multiple nationally representative surveys spanning more than three decades, we find that public attitudes toward birthright citizenship have remained relatively stable overall—particularly since the mid-1990s—but have become increasingly divided along partisan lines. Further, while awareness of birthright citizenship is widespread, knowledge of its constitutional basis is comparatively limited, politically polarized, and appears to have little influence on public attitudes.

## PUBLIC OPINION ON BIRTHRIGHT CITIZENSHIP IS STABLE OVER TIME BUT INCREASINGLY DIVIDED BY PARTY

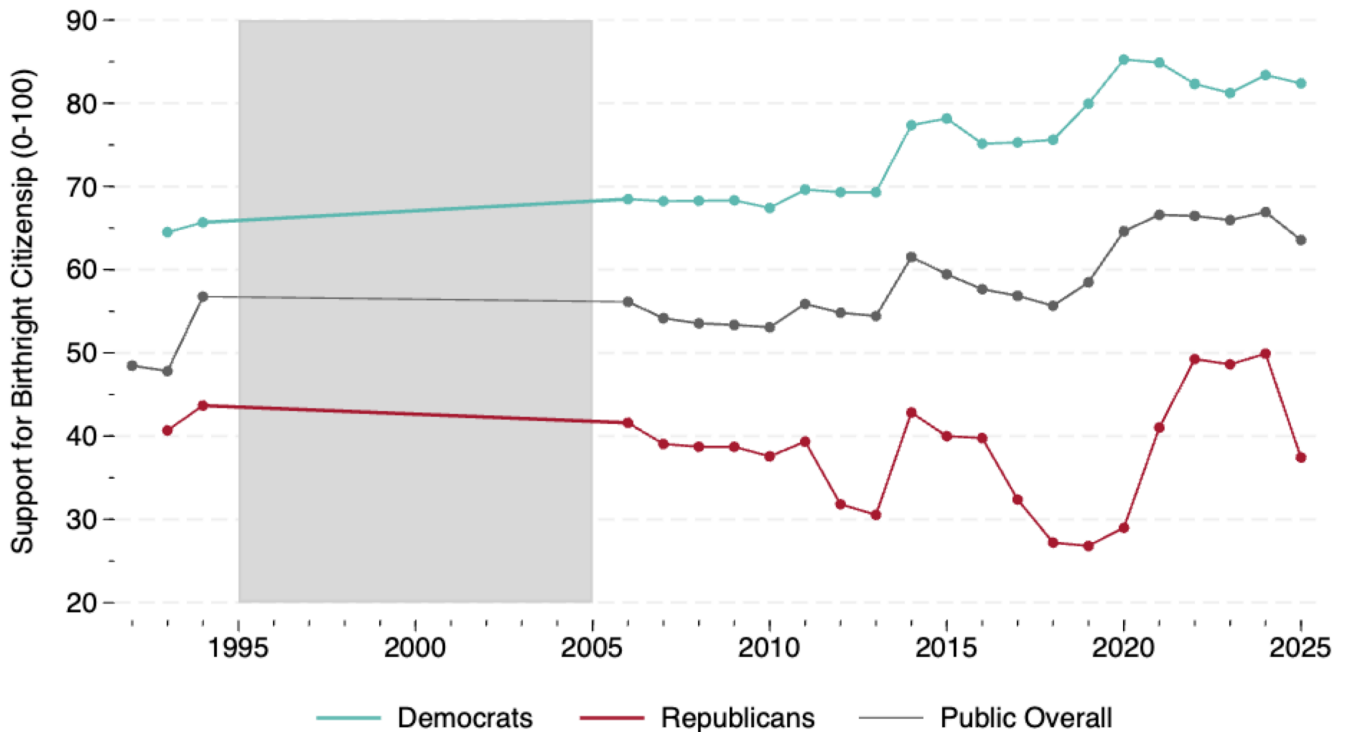
Individual survey questions provide useful snapshots of public opinion on birthright citizenship, but variation in their frequency, wording, and emphasis makes it difficult to track trends over time.

To track how public opinion has evolved, we combine five distinct survey time series that span 49 survey measurements from 1992 to 2025 into a single long-run estimate of underlying attitudes toward birthright citizenship.<sup>1</sup> Although these questions differ in framing, they capture the same core issue: whether individuals born in the United States automatically should receive citizenship.

Figure 1 shows long-run trends in support for birthright citizenship for the public

overall and by party.<sup>2</sup> The values can be interpreted as the average level of support for maintaining birthright citizenship across the available surveys in each year.<sup>3</sup> When first measured in the early 1990s, 48% supported maintaining birthright citizenship. By the mid-1990s, support had reached 57-58% and remained relatively stable at that level for more than two decades. Around 2020, support increased to about 65% and remained in the mid-60% range through 2025.

**Figure 1. Trends in Support for Maintaining Birthright Citizenship, by Party**



Note: Lines show estimated trends for Democrats, Republicans, and the public overall. Estimates are derived from a Stimson dyadic ratios model combining five survey time series spanning 1992–2025 for the public series and 1993–2025 for the Democrat and Republican series. Values represent a smoothed index (0–100) of support for maintaining birthright citizenship, with higher values indicating greater support. No available surveys measured birthright citizenship attitudes between 1995 and 2005 (gray shaded region). The lines shown across this period connect the last available observations before the gap to the first observation after it and does not reflect annual survey data.

Beneath this overall pattern lies a sharp and widening partisan divide. From the early 1990s through the mid-2000s, differences in support between Democrats and Republicans ranged from the low-20s to around 30 percentage points. Since roughly 2008 —when the gap first reached 30 percentage points—these differences have grown markedly. Democratic support has increased steadily, rising from the mid- to upper-60s during the 1993–2013 period to above 80% in recent years.

While Republican support in 2025 (37%) is similar to that in 1993 (41%), it has varied

greatly over this period. Support was around 40% from 1993 to 2011, but became erratic over the last 15 years, swinging from a low of 27% support in 2019 to a high of 50% in 2024 before dropping again to 37% in 2025.

As a result of these divergent trends, the partisan gap has widened. In the most recent estimates, the difference between Democrats and Republicans reaches 45 percentage points—roughly double the size of the gap observed in earlier decades. Appendix Figure B1 shows that differences by ideology follow a similar—and in some cases even starker—pattern.

These findings suggest that although support for birthright citizenship is now the majority position among the American public, attitudes are increasingly structured by political identity, with Democrats and Republicans holding increasingly opposing views on whether citizenship should be granted to those born in the United States regardless of their parents' status.

### **SUPPORT FOR BIRTHRIGHT CITIZENSHIP DECLINES ACROSS IMMIGRANT GENERATIONS**

Differences also emerge across immigrant generations, revealing a consistent relationship between proximity to the immigrant experience and support for maintaining birthright citizenship.

Figure 2 shows support for birthright citizenship by immigrant generation using data from the American National Election Studies (ANES), spanning 2016 to 2024. Respondents are grouped into four categories: first-generation immigrants (foreign-born), second-generation Americans (U.S.-born with at least one immigrant parent), third-generation Americans, and fourth-generation (or higher) Americans.

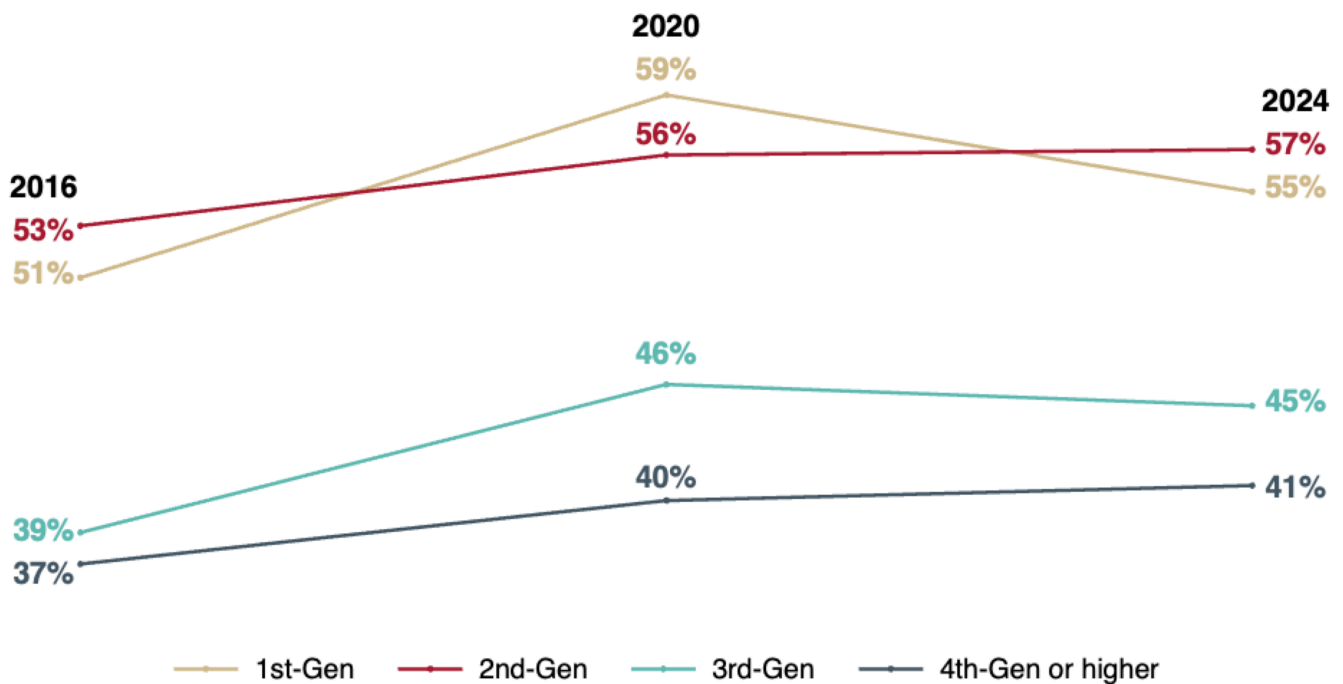
Across all three survey waves, a clear pattern emerges: support for birthright citizenship is higher among first- and second-generation Americans than among those in later generations.<sup>4</sup> While first- and second-generation respondents exhibit similar levels of support—and neither group is consistently more supportive than the other—both are more likely than third- and fourth-generation Americans to oppose efforts to eliminate birthright citizenship. In 2024, for example, roughly 55–57% of first- and second-generation respondents opposed changing the Constitution to eliminate it, compared with about 45% of third-generation respondents and 41% of fourth-generation Americans.

Even after controlling for party identification, ideology, race/ethnicity, education, age, and other demographic characteristics, second-, third-, and fourth-generation respondents remain significantly less likely than first-generation immigrants to support maintaining birthright citizenship.<sup>5</sup>

These findings suggest that attitudes toward birthright citizenship are shaped not only by political affiliation, but also by individuals' connection to the immigrant experience.

Americans who are immigrants themselves, or who are more closely connected to immigrant families, are more likely to support maintaining birthright citizenship, while support declines as generational distance from immigration increases.

**Figure 2. Opposition to Changing the Constitution to Eliminate Birthright Citizenship, by Immigration Generation**



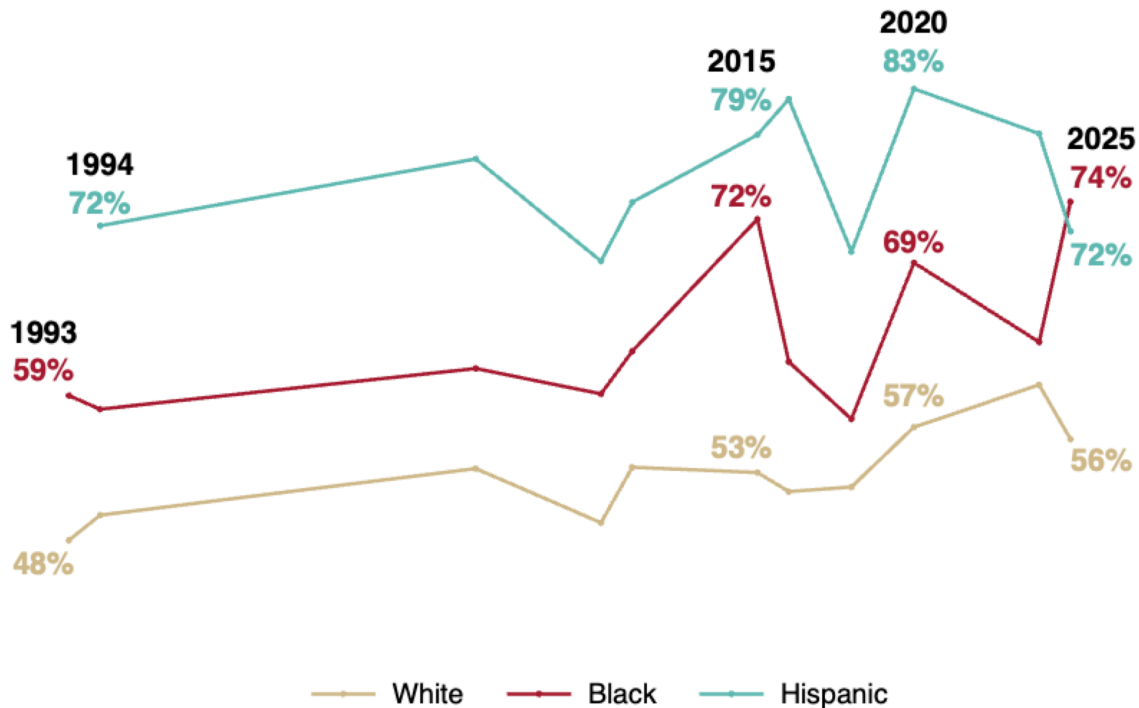
Note: Estimates are weighted to represent the U.S. adult population (n = 4,190 in 2016, 8,149 in 2020, and 5,174 in 2024). Lines show the percentage of respondents who selected “Oppose” in response to the following question: “Some people have proposed that the U.S. Constitution should be changed so that the children of unauthorized immigrants do not automatically get citizenship if they are born in this country. Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose this proposal?” “Neither” and “Favor” responses are included in the data but not shown in the chart.  
 Source: American National Election Studies (2016-2024).

**WHITE AMERICANS ARE GENERALLY LESS SUPPORTIVE OF BIRTHRIGHT CITIZENSHIP— BUT NOT AMONG DEMOCRATS**

Differences in support for birthright citizenship are also evident across racial and ethnic groups (Figure 3). While the data are somewhat noisy, they show that Hispanic Americans—followed by black Americans—are consistently more supportive of preserving birthright citizenship than white Americans. Since 1994, Hispanic support has dipped below 70% in only a single year (69% in 2010) and has otherwise generally ranged between 70% and 82%. Support among black Americans is somewhat lower—though still substantial—ranging from 57% to 74%. White Americans, in contrast, consistently register the lowest—

but still majority—levels of support, ranging from 49% to 60%. As of 2025, an average of 72% of Hispanics, 74% of black Americans, and 56% of white Americans supported birthright citizenship.

**Figure 3. Support for Birthright Citizenship, by Race/Ethnicity**



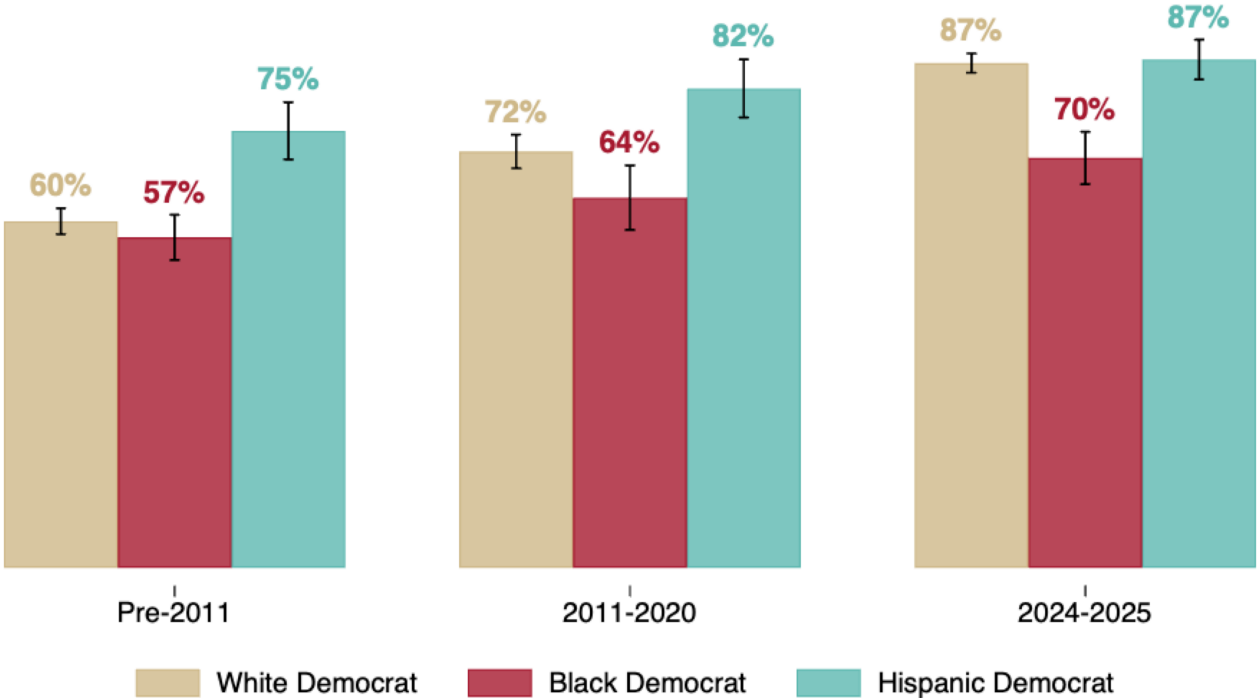
Note: Lines show estimated support for maintaining birthright citizenship by race and ethnicity. Estimates are derived from individual-level regression models of pro-birthright citizenship responses, pooling multiple survey items from 1993 to 2026. Values represent predicted probabilities (percent) with 95% confidence intervals. Hispanics are excluded from 1993 due to small sample size.

These differences, however, cannot be interpreted in isolation from other factors, such as immigration generation and party affiliation. As shown in the previous section, support for birthright citizenship is higher among individuals with more direct or recent connections to immigration. Because Hispanic respondents are more likely, on average, to be first- or second-generation Americans, their higher levels of support are consistent with this broader relationship.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, adjusting for immigration generation moderates—but does not eliminate—this pattern. Hispanics of all generations remain more supportive than their non-Hispanic counterparts.

A similar qualification applies to differences involving white respondents. Lower support among white respondents is partly a function of their disproportionate alignment with the Republican Party. Controlling for party, differences in support between white and black Americans largely diminish and, in some cases, even reverse.

Hispanic respondents, however, remain more supportive than their counterparts within each party—at least until recently. As shown in Figure 4, among Democrats, racial differences in support have narrowed over time, driven in large part by rising support among white Democrats. During the earliest (pre-2011) period, Hispanic Democrats (75%) averaged roughly 15 percentage points higher support than their white counterparts (60%). From 2011 to 2020, the gap fell to about 10 points (82% vs. 72%). In the most recent data, however, it has effectively disappeared, with levels nearly identical (82%) among both white and Hispanic Democrats. Meanwhile, support among black Democrats has also increased over time, though not at the same pace as among white Democrats. As a result, while still high, recent data show black Democrats registering slightly lower levels of support than other Democratic groups.

**Figure 4. Support for Birthright Citizenship among Democrats, by Race/Ethnicity**



Note: Bars show estimated Democratic support for maintaining birthright citizenship by race and ethnicity. Estimates are derived from individual-level regression models of pro-birthright citizenship responses, pooling multiple survey items from 1993 to 2025. Values represent predicted probabilities (percent) with 95% confidence intervals. Estimates are grouped into multi-year periods rather than shown annually due to limited sample sizes for race-by-party subgroups in individual surveys. Pooling across periods improves statistical precision and reduces noise while preserving broad temporal patterns.

No comparable convergence is observed among Republicans (Appendix Figure B2). Estimates for black Republicans are based on relatively small samples and fluctuate

across periods, but white Republicans consistently exhibit the lowest levels of support, while Hispanic Republicans remain the most supportive within the party.

Overall, these patterns suggest that while race and ethnicity remain important correlates of attitudes toward birthright citizenship, they do not operate independently of political and social context. Differences across groups are shaped in part by immigration background and partisan alignment—and, importantly, can evolve over time.

### **PUBLIC AWARENESS OF BIRTHRIGHT CITIZENSHIP IS HIGH—BUT KNOWLEDGE OF ITS CONSTITUTIONAL BASIS IS MORE LIMITED AND UNEVEN**

Public attitudes toward birthright citizenship often are discussed in legal and constitutional terms. Yet relatively few surveys have examined whether Americans are aware of the policy itself—or whether they understand its constitutional basis. The evidence shows more people are aware of the policy than understand the legal theory behind it (Figure 5).

Data in the left panel show that public awareness of birthright citizenship is both widespread and has grown over time. In the first survey (2006) to ask about awareness, 84% of Americans reported that they were familiar with the policy. By 2015, that figure had risen to 92%, with virtually no differences by party affiliation.

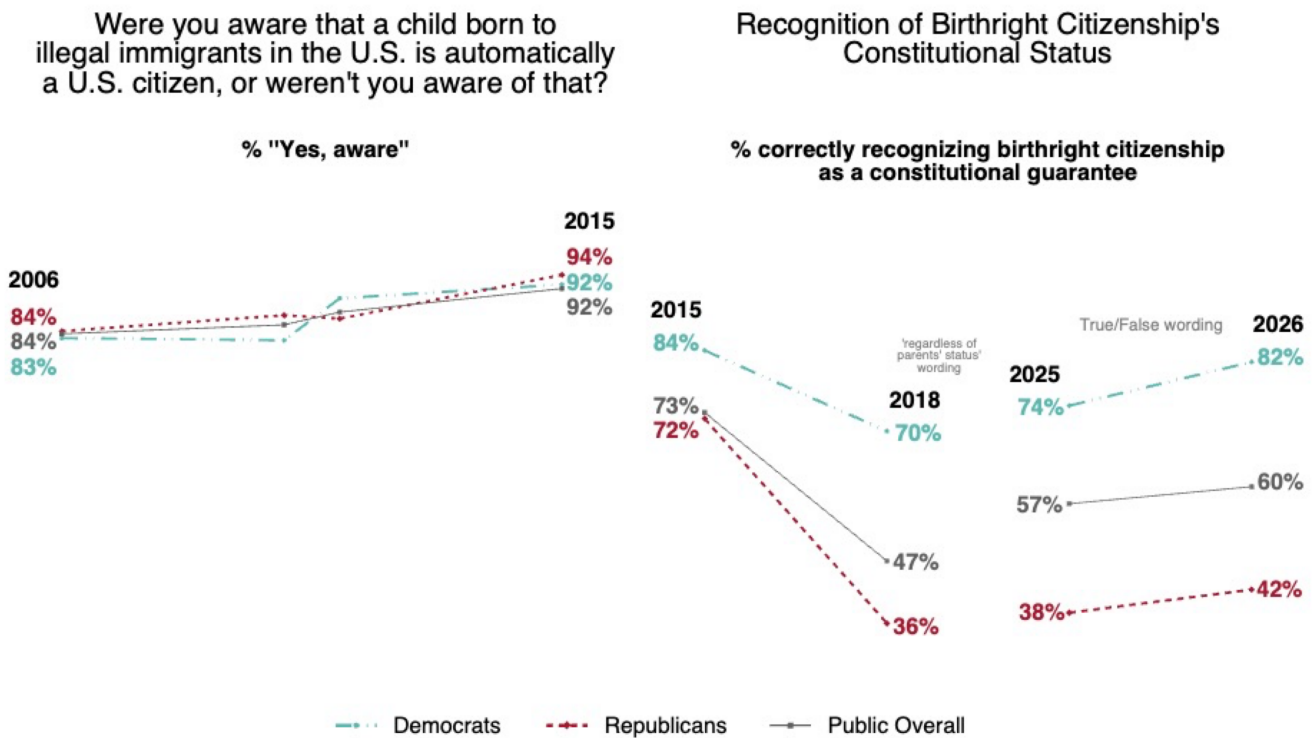
The right panel, however, presents a more fragmented picture when the question shifts from awareness to constitutional knowledge. In an August 2015 YouGov survey, 73% of Americans correctly indicated that the Constitution grants citizenship to all U.S.-born children. Unlike with awareness, responses diverged by party: 84% of Democrats, compared with 72% of Republicans, answered correctly.

When a similar question was asked in a November 2018 YouGov/The Economist survey—with the added clause “regardless of the immigration or citizenship status of the parents”—correct responses dropped sharply, to 47% of the public overall. At the same time, partisan differences widened, with 70% of Democrats and just 36% of Republicans answering in the affirmative.

More recent surveys conducted in 2025 and 2026 used a true/false format but yielded similar patterns. Across these surveys, between 57% and 60% of Americans correctly identified that the Constitution guarantees citizenship to all persons born in the United States regardless of parental status. Once again, Democrats were the most likely to answer correctly (74% to 82%), while Republicans were the least likely (38% to 42%).

While the vast majority of Americans are aware that birthright citizenship exists, fewer understand that it is rooted in the constitution—and this gap is closely associated with partisan identity.

**Figure 5. Public Awareness and Constitutional Knowledge of Birthright Citizenship, by Party**



Note: Lines show partisan differences in awareness and knowledge of birthright citizenship. The left panel, based on data from the Pew Research Center, reports the percentage of respondents who say they are aware that children born in the United States to unauthorized immigrants are automatically U.S. citizens. The right panel, based on various YouGov surveys, reports the percentage correctly recognizing birthright citizenship as a constitutional guarantee. Estimates are drawn from individual survey items fielded at different points in time and are not strictly comparable across all years due to differences in question wording. Dashed lines indicate comparisons across items with differing wording, including the introduction of a “regardless of parents’ status” frame in 2018, while solid lines connect comparable true/false items fielded in 2025–2026.

**NO CLEAR EVIDENCE THAT CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMING SHAPES ATTITUDES**

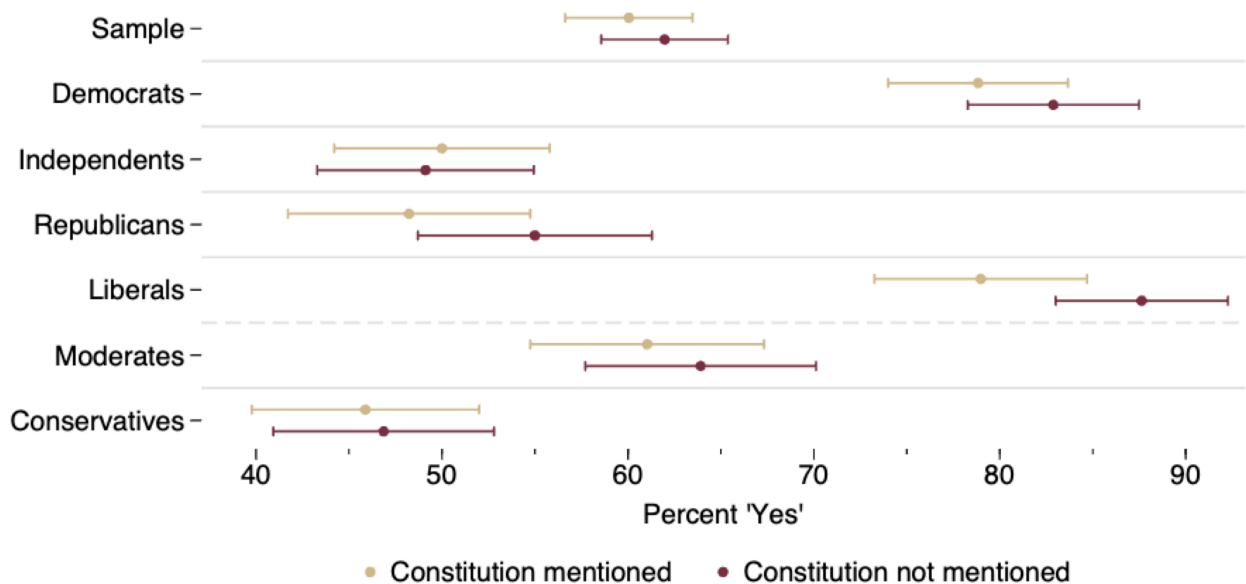
If Americans differ in their knowledge of birthright citizenship’s constitutional status, do those knowledge differences translate into differences in opinion? One possibility is that reminding respondents that birthright citizenship is grounded in the Constitution would increase support for maintaining the policy. To test this, we draw on a survey experiment embedded in a December 2022 Los Angeles Times/YouGov survey.

In this experiment, respondents were randomly assigned to one of two versions of a question about birthright citizenship. In one condition, the question explicitly referenced the Constitution (e.g., “The U.S. Constitution says that...”), while in the other, this language was omitted. This design allows us to isolate the effect of constitutional framing on support for maintaining birthright citizenship.

The results, shown in Figure 6, suggest that constitutional framing doesn't impact support for birthright citizenship. Among respondents overall, the two conditions produce no meaningful difference. This lack of difference persists across partisan groups. Among Democrats, support remains high regardless of framing—79% when the Constitution is mentioned and 83% when it is not. Among Republicans, support is substantially lower than among Democrats overall and again shows no statistically significant difference when constitutional language is included (48% vs. 55%). Differences among independents (50% vs. 49%) are also minimal.

**Figure 6. Effect of Constitutional Framing on Support for Birthright Citizenship, Overall and by Political Group**

[The U.S. Constitution says that / Currently,] all persons born in the U.S. are citizens, regardless of whether their parents were here legally. Should the U.S. continue to provide citizenship to all who are born here?



Note: Points show estimated support for maintaining birthright citizenship under two randomly assigned question wordings: one that references the U.S. Constitution and one that does not. Estimates are based on a split-sample experiment from a December 2022 Los Angeles Times poll of U.S. adult citizens (N = 1,567; 786 in the Constitution-mentioned condition, 781 in the non-mention condition). Values represent the percentage of respondents answering 'Yes'. Error bars are 95% confidence intervals. Subgroup estimates are shown by partisanship and ideology.

When examined by ideology, however, a more distinct—though not uniform—pattern emerges. Among liberals, mentioning the Constitution is associated with a modest but statistically significant decrease in support for birthright citizenship—79% when the Constitution was mentioned in the question compared with 88% when it wasn't. Among conservatives and moderates the framing has no meaningful effect.

While caution is warranted in drawing broad conclusions from a single survey experiment, these findings suggest that although Americans vary substantially in their understanding of whether birthright citizenship is constitutionally guaranteed, simply providing that information does not appear to shift their views in a meaningful way.

## **CONCLUSION**

Public opinion on birthright citizenship is marked by long periods of stability, occasionally interrupted by notable increases in support. This generally stable but positive trend, however, masks a widening partisan divide: Democrats have become increasingly supportive of maintaining birthright citizenship, while Republican attitudes have remained more variable and, on net, similar to earlier decades.

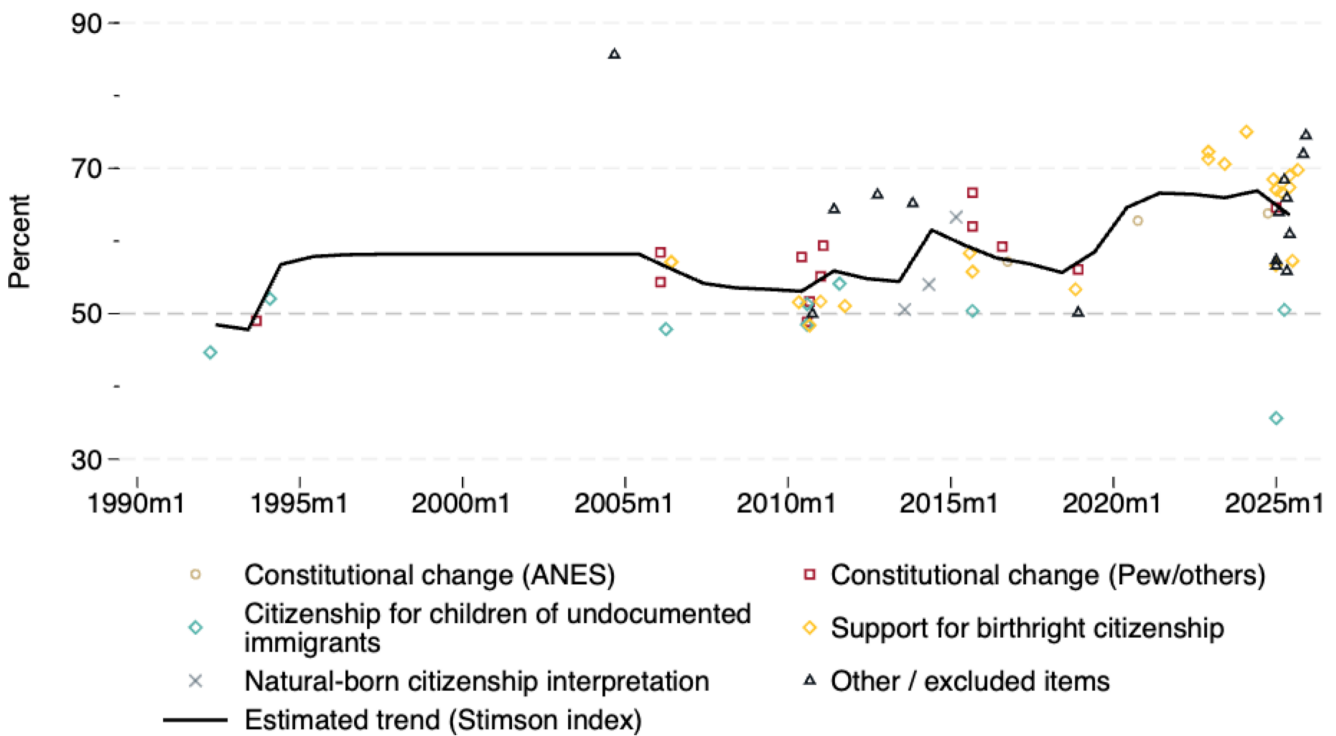
At the same time, attitudes are shaped by more than partisanship alone. Support is consistently higher among first- and second-generation Americans and declines with generational distance from the immigrant experience. Differences across racial and ethnic groups are also evident, though these patterns are closely intertwined with both party affiliation and immigration background—and, in some cases, have narrowed over time.

Finally, while awareness of birthright citizenship is widespread, knowledge of its constitutional basis is more uneven and closely associated with political identity. Yet the results of the survey experiment suggest that simply invoking the Constitution does little to shift public attitudes.

Overall, these findings indicate that public views on birthright citizenship are shaped less by constitutional considerations and more by broader political, social, and personal factors that influence how Americans think about immigration and national membership.

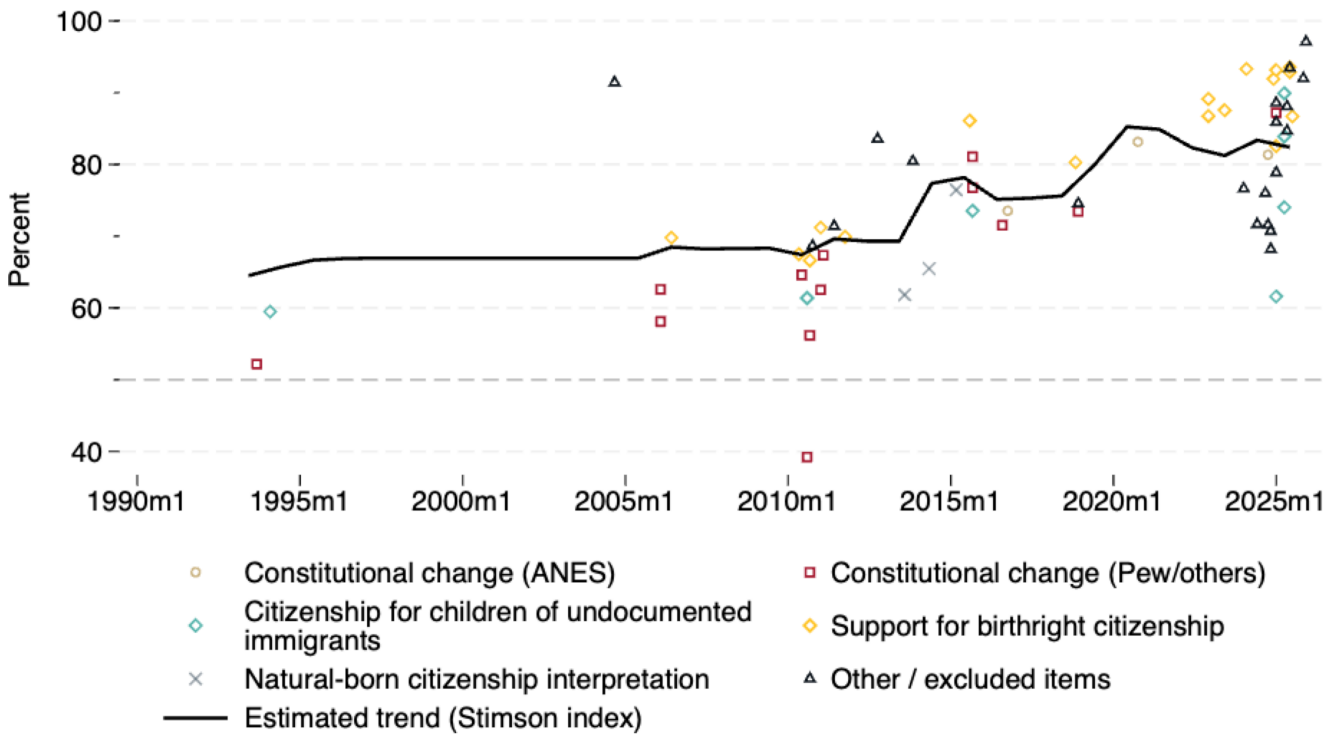
## APPENDIX A: SURVEY ITEMS AND STIMSON INDEX

**Figure A1. Survey Items and Stimson Index (Full Sample)**



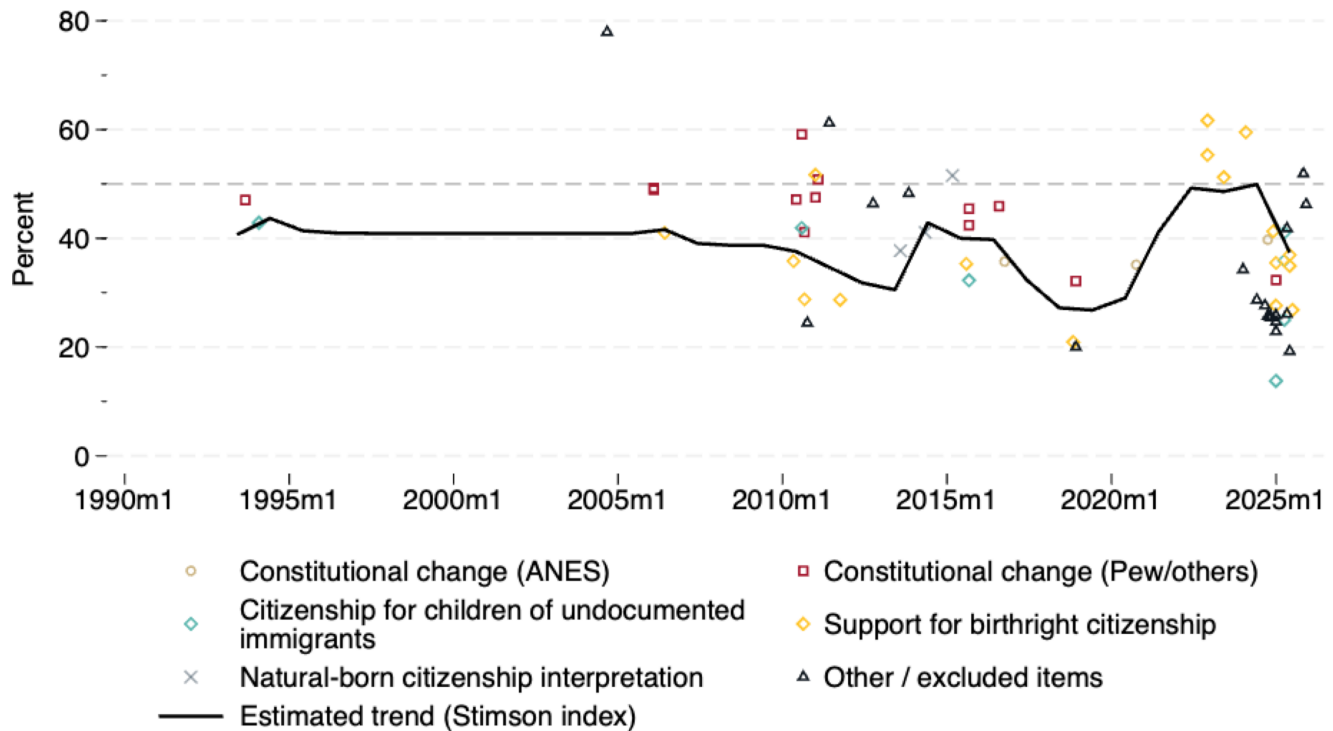
Note: Markers represent individual survey estimates of support for maintaining birthright citizenship, measured as the share of respondents giving a pro-birthright response in each survey. Markers are grouped by item series, with symbol types indicating differences in question wording and content; items that do not meet inclusion criteria (“Other/excluded items”) are also shown for reference. The solid line shows the estimated Stimson index, constructed from 49 survey items across five series, each measured in at least three different years. A total of 64 items are displayed, of which 15 are excluded from the index due to insufficient temporal coverage. Values are shown in percent. See Section A of the separate Supplementary Appendix for a complete list of survey items, question wording, and series classifications.

**Figure A2. Survey Items and Stimson Index (Democrats)**



Note: Markers represent individual survey estimates of Democratic support for maintaining birthright citizenship, measured as the share of Democratic respondents giving a pro-birthright response in each survey. Markers are grouped by item series, with symbol types indicating differences in question wording and content; items that do not meet inclusion criteria (“Other/excluded items”) are also shown for reference. The solid line shows the estimated Stimson index, constructed from 49 survey items across five series, each measured in at least three different years. A total of 63 items are displayed, of which 20 are excluded from the index due to insufficient temporal coverage. Values are shown in percent. See Section A of the separate Supplementary Appendix for a complete list of survey items, question wording, and series classifications.

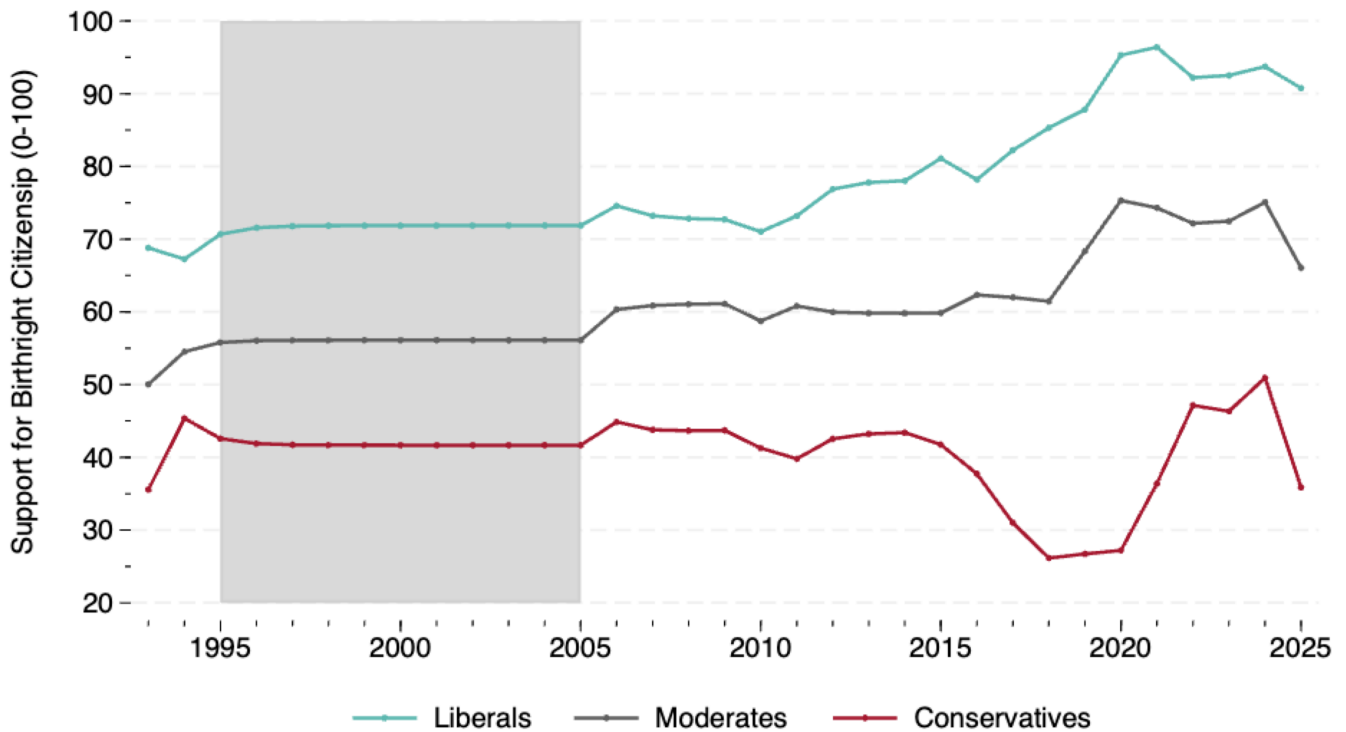
**Figure A3. Survey Items and Stimson Index (Republicans)**



Note: Markers represent individual survey estimates of Republican support for maintaining birthright citizenship, measured as the share of Republican respondents giving a pro-birthright response in each survey. Markers are grouped by item series, with symbol types indicating differences in question wording and content; items that do not meet inclusion criteria (“Other/excluded items”) are also shown for reference. The solid line shows the estimated Stimson index, constructed from 49 survey items across five series, each measured in at least three different years. A total of 63 items are displayed, of which 20 are excluded from the index due to insufficient temporal coverage. Values are shown in percent. See Section A of the separate Supplementary Appendix for a complete list of survey items, question wording, and series classifications.

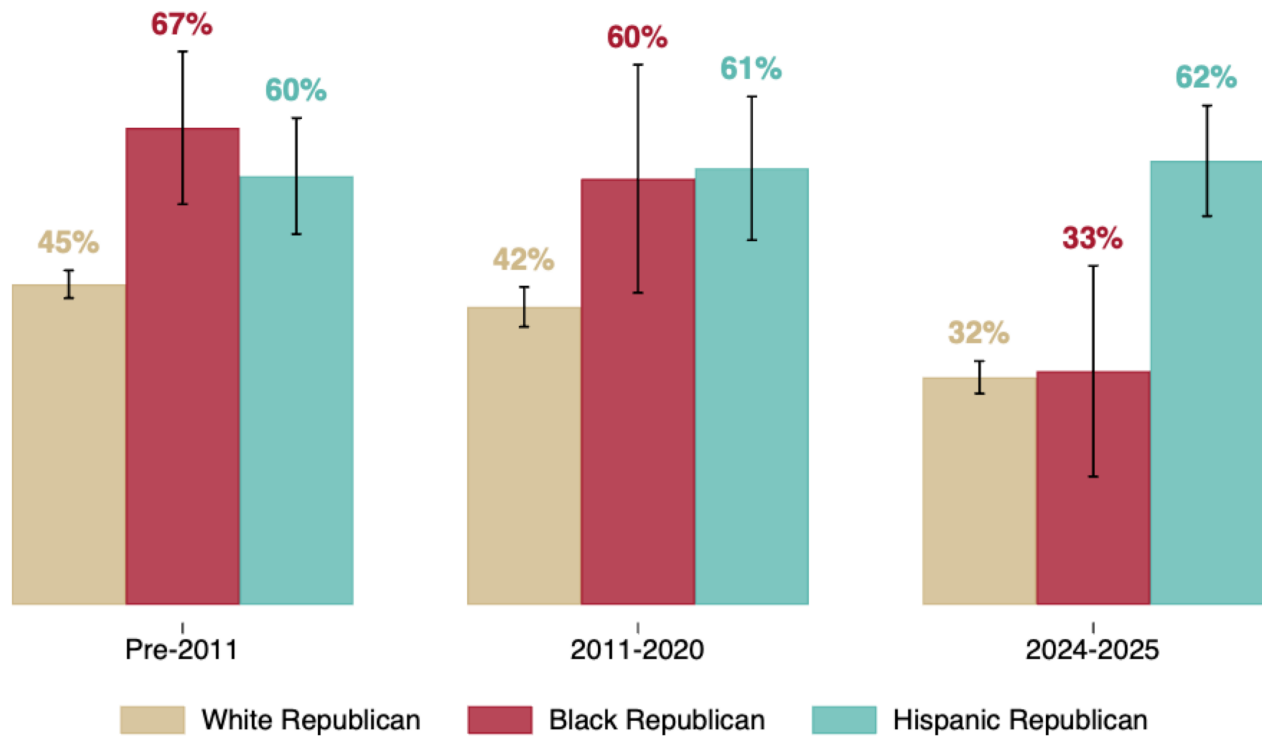
## APPENDIX B: SUPPLEMENTARY ANALYSES AND FIGURES

**Figure B1. Trends in Support for Maintaining Birthright Citizenship, by Ideology**



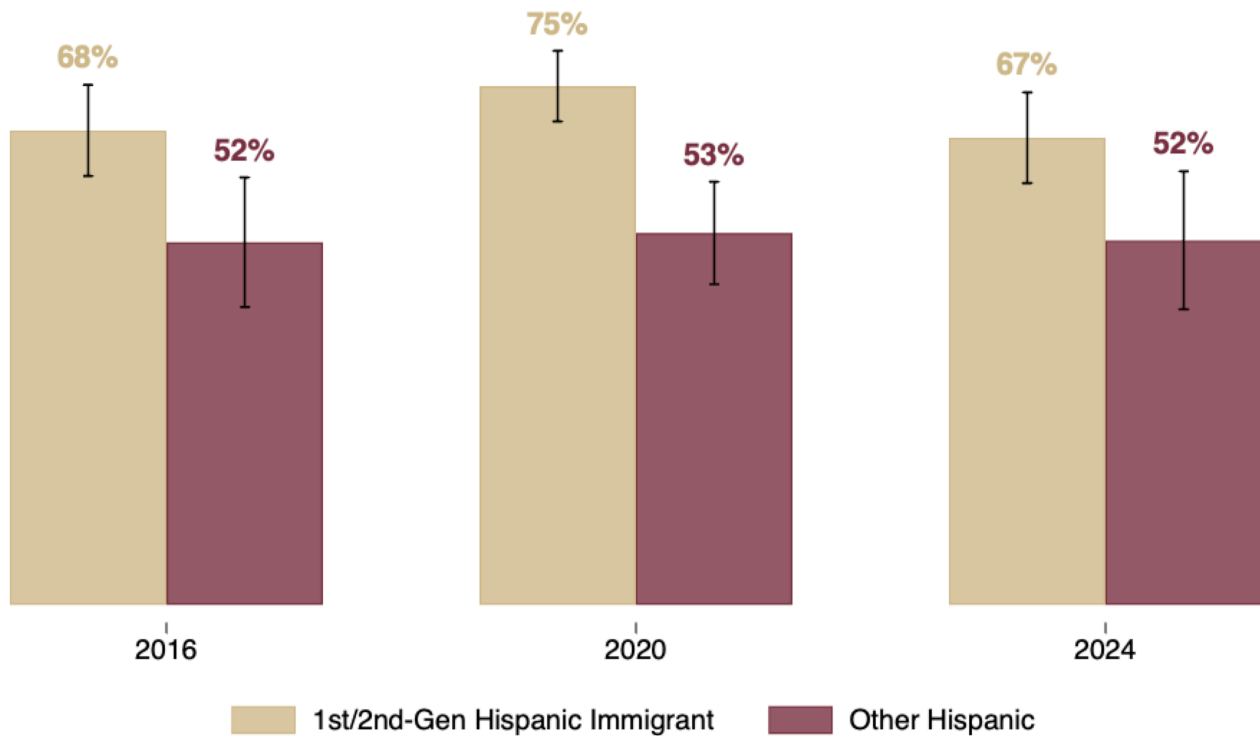
Note: Lines show estimated trends for Liberal, Moderate, and Conservative respondents. Estimates are derived from a Stimson dyadic ratios model combining five survey time series spanning 1993–2025. Values represent a smoothed index (0–100) of support for maintaining birthright citizenship, with higher values indicating greater support. No available surveys measured birthright citizenship attitudes between 1995 and 2005 (gray shaded region). Index values for this period are interpolated based on earlier and subsequent observations and should therefore be interpreted with caution.

**Figure B2. Support for Birthright Citizenship among Republicans, by Race/Ethnicity**



Note: Bars show estimated Republican support for maintaining birthright citizenship by race and ethnicity. Estimates are derived from individual-level regression models of pro-birthright citizenship responses, pooling multiple survey items from 1993 to 2025. Values represent predicted probabilities (percent) with 95% confidence intervals. Estimates are grouped into multi-year periods rather than shown annually due to limited sample sizes for race-by-party subgroups. Pooling across periods improves statistical precision and reduces noise while preserving broad temporal patterns. Estimates for Black Republicans are based on relatively small samples (N≈60 per period) and should be interpreted with caution.

**Figure B3. Hispanic Opposition to Changing the Constitution to Eliminate Birthright Citizenship, by Immigration Generation**



Note: Estimates are weighted to represent the U.S. Hispanic adult population (n = 439 in 2016, 750 in 2020, and 545 in 2024). Bars show the percentage of Hispanic respondents who selected “Oppose” in response to the following question: “Some people have proposed that the U.S. Constitution should be changed so that the children of unauthorized immigrants do not automatically get citizenship if they are born in this country. Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose this proposal?” Respondents are grouped by immigrant generation (first/second generation vs. other Hispanics). Values are shown with 95% confidence intervals. “Neither” and “Favor” responses are included in the data but not shown in the chart. First/second generation includes foreign-born respondents and U.S.-born respondents with at least one foreign-born parent.

Source: American National Election Studies (2016–2024).

<sup>1</sup> See Section A of the separate Supplemental Appendix for a list of all survey items, their question wording, and the surveys from which they originate. See Section C to download a dataset containing all individual survey items, metadata, and available covariates.

<sup>2</sup> These estimates are generated using a Stimson dyadic ratios algorithm, which models latent public opinion by combining multiple survey series with varying question wording and field dates. By leveraging overlapping observations across surveys, the method produces a smoothed and comparable estimate of underlying opinion over time. The resulting estimates account for 75% of the variation across the five time series for the overall public, and 98% and 71% for Democrats and Republicans, respectively. See Section B of the separate Supplemental Appendix for additional methodological details and a downloadable dataset containing the Stimson estimates.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix Figure A1 for a scatter plot of individual survey estimates underlying the Stimson index, disaggregated by item series and including excluded items, with the estimated trend overlaid. Corresponding plots for Democrats and Republicans are shown in Appendix Figures A2 and A3, providing a visual assessment of item coverage and model fit.

<sup>4</sup> See Figure B3 in Appendix Section B for results among Hispanics.

<sup>5</sup> Predicted probabilities from these models indicate a decline in support from roughly 52% among first-generation respondents to about 43% among third- and fourth-generation Americans.

<sup>6</sup> In the most recent (2024) ANES wave, 69% of Hispanic respondents were either first (28%) or second-generation (41%) immigrants as compared to 20% of black and 9% of white respondents.

<sup>7</sup> This change in responses likely reflects, at least in part, differences in how respondents interpret the more detailed and politically charged wording of the question.