

Melissa LoPalo
Associate Professor
Montana State University

“Is Climate Anxiety a Driver of Fertility Decline?”

Abstract: Birth rates in developed countries are at historical lows, and continue to fall. Climate change is frequently mentioned as one reason that younger cohorts are choosing fewer children. However, there is very little empirical research on whether concerns about climate change are an important contributor to fertility decisions. In this paper, we first examine whether survey-reported ideal family size responds to high-frequency shocks in the salience of climate change: large, climate-linked natural disasters. We find transitory effects only among certain subgroups of the population, such as Democrats and the college educated. Second, using spatially varying measures of climate risk, we do not find that places that are more exposed to climate change have experienced larger declines in actual fertility. While this issue may be important for a small subset of families, we do not find evidence that climate anxiety is a major contributor to declining birth rates in the United States.