

Media Narratives of the Economy and Fertility

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Abstract

In this contribution, we argue that economic narratives conveyed by the media are crucial for understanding contemporary fertility dynamics net of objective economic constraints. We test such a hypothesis for Italy by combining individual-level data from the 2009 and 2016 releases of the nationally-representative Family and Social Subjects Surveys with Media Tenor data on the media coverage of the economy derived from the evening newscast of Italian TV channel one. Our findings reveal that both the incidence and tone of news on the state of the economy influence fertility behavior. An increase in the number of negative economic news items inhibits fertility, whereas an increase in positive news items facilitates fertility. The share of economic coverage out of all news has a negative association with fertility, yet this weakens as the average tone of the news improves. Interestingly, when positive news items outnumber negative ones, an increase in the incidence of economic news encourages fertility. These effects are substantially relevant, and statistically significant, net of contextual and individuals' socioeconomic characteristics.

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