

Abstract

Do wars affect fertility? Although in the popular view wars are thought to cause swings in fertility, evidence suggests that wars were followed by only short term increases in fertility rates (Ryder, 1980). In this paper I examine the effect of wars on fertility by comparing the fertility response of American women of ancestry belonging to the winners and losers of World War II. The analysis, based on the number of children ever born shows that American women of Axis ancestry have increased their fertility by less than other women in the U.S. between 1940 and 1960. Nevertheless, a more careful analysis shows that only women of Italian origin drives the results while women of German origin show no response. Moreover, falsification tests, comparing 1930 to 1940 show “effects” between 1930 and 1940. I conclude that the setting chosen here cannot teach us much about this interesting question.