

Uncertainty and Fertility

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Across Europe, fertility is declining in strikingly similar ways—often even where economic conditions remain relatively strong. This talk challenges conventional explanations by arguing that fertility decisions are shaped less by past and present constraints and more by how people imagine their future. Bringing together demographic trends, causal evidence, and experimental findings, it shows that economic, environmental, and social uncertainty operate through narratives of the future—formed by personal experience, expectations, and media discourse—to delay or discourage childbearing. To understand contemporary fertility decline, we must look beyond objective conditions and reckon with the powerful influence of imagined futures.

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