

Malthusian Migrations

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Abstract :

We argue that societies with higher fertility experience increased levels of emigration. During the Age of Mass Migration, persistently high fertility created a large reservoir of surplus labor that could find better opportunities in the New World. We denote such migrations, from labor-abundant to land-abundant regions, as Malthusian migrations. Our results hold in a variety of datasets and specifications, across countries, regions, individuals, and periods. Using linguistic distance from French and twin births as instruments for fertility in crowdsourced genealogical data, we estimate a large effect of fertility on out-migration. Within households, later born children were more likely to migrate as fertility increased, particularly in regions with egalitarian inheritance. We develop a Malthusian model allowing for emigration as a way to escape population pressures, alleviating the negative effects of high fertility and contributing to the emergence of modern economic growth.