

RURAL DEMOGRAPHY

Energy development impacts

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Natural resource booms, as from mining and energy development, promote population shifts as workers move into and out of 'boom towns'. In the United States and elsewhere, the movement of younger and educated workers to cities threatens many rural communities. Much recent oil and gas development is centred in such beleaguered communities.

Adam Mayer, of Colorado State University, and colleagues assessed whether the boom in oil and gas extraction, catalysed by hydraulic fracturing and directional drilling, could reverse the rural 'hollowing out' in the US. They used county-level data, mostly from the US Department of Agriculture, to compare 'treatment' counties,

which experienced a boom, with similar 'control' counties, which did not. Boom counties had slightly more younger and working-age adults but fewer residents who completed at least some college. Data were for the years 2000 (pre-boom) and 2010 (mid-boom). The findings suggest the oil and gas boom will not solve the demographic challenges in many rural American counties, a cautionary finding considering the broader enthusiasm for boom economies and their chequered history.

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