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Front Pages

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Athens Institute is an Athens-based World Association of Academics and Researchers based in Athens. Athens Institute is an independent and non-profit Association with a Mission to become a forum where Academics and Researchers from all over the world can meet in Athens, exchange ideas on their research and discuss future developments in their disciplines, as well as engage with professionals from other fields. Athens was chosen because of its long history of academic gatherings, which go back thousands of years to Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum. Both these historic places are within walking distance from Athens Institute's downtown offices. Since antiquity, Athens was an open city. In the words of Pericles, Athens "…is open to the world, we never expel a foreigner from learning or seeing". ("Pericles' Funeral Oration", in Thucydides, The History of the Peloponnesian War). It is Athens Institute's mission to revive the glory of Ancient Athens by inviting the World Academic Community to the city, to learn from each other in an environment of freedom and respect for other people's opinions and beliefs. After all, the free expression of one's opinion formed the basis for the development of democracy, and Athens was its cradle. As it turned out, the Golden Age of Athens was in fact, the Golden Age of the Western Civilization. Education and (Re)searching for the 'truth' are the pillars of any free (democratic) society. This is the reason why Education and Research are the two core words in Athens Institute's name.

The *Athens Journal of Demography & Anthropology* (AJDA) is an Open Access quarterly double-blind peer reviewed journal and considers papers from all areas of psychology. Many of the papers published in this journal have been presented at the various conferences sponsored by the **Languages & Linguistics Unit** and the **Literature Unit** of the **Athens Institute for Education and Research (ATINER)**. All papers are subject to ATINER's Publication Ethical Policy and Statement.

Athens Journal of Demography & Anthropology
Editorial and Reviewers' Board

President's Message

All Athens Institute's publications including its e-journals are open access without any costs (submission, processing, publishing, open access paid by authors, open access paid by readers etc.) and is independent of presentations at any of the many small events (conferences, symposiums, forums, colloquiums, courses, roundtable discussions) organized by Athens Institute throughout the year and entail significant costs of participating. The intellectual property rights of the submitting papers remain with the author. Before you submit, please make sure your paper meets the basic academic standards, which includes proper English. Some articles will be selected from the numerous papers that have been presented at the various annual international academic conferences organized by the different divisions and units of the Athens Institute for Education and Research. The plethora of papers presented every year will enable the editorial board of each journal to select the best, and in so doing produce a top-quality academic journal. In addition to papers presented, Athens Institute will encourage the independent submission of papers to be evaluated for publication.

The current issue is the first of the first volume of the *Demography & Anthropology* (AJDA), by the published by the **Literature Unit** of the **Athens Institute**. All papers are subject to Athens Institute's Publication Ethical Policy and Statement.

Gregory T. Papanikos
President
Athens Institute

Athens Institute for Education and Research
A World Association of Academics and Researchers

18ᵗʰ Annual International Conference on Languages & Linguistics
7-10 July 2025, Athens, Greece

The Languages and Linguistics Unit of Athens Institute, will hold its **18ᵗʰ Annual International Conference on Languages & Linguistics, 7-10 July 2025, Athens, Greece** sponsored by the Athens Journal of Philology. The conference is soliciting papers (in English only) from all areas of languages, linguistics and other related disciplines. You may participate as stream organizer, presenter of one paper, chair a session or observer. Please submit a proposal using the form available (https://www.atiner.gr/2025/FORM-LNG.doc).

Academic Members Responsible for the Conference

- **Dr. Valia Spiliotopoulos,** Head, Languages & Linguistics Unit, ATINER and Associate Professor of Professional Practice & Academic Director Centre for English Language Learning, Teaching, and Research (CELLTR), Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University, Canada

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Important Dates

- Abstract Submission: **18 March 2025**
- Acceptance of Abstract: **4 Weeks after Submission**
- Submission of Paper: **9 June 2025**

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The Social Program Emphasizes the Educational Aspect of the Academic Meetings of Athens Institute.

- Greek Night Entertainment (This is the official dinner of the conference)
- Athens Sightseeing: Old and New-An Educational Urban Walk
- Social Dinner
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Conference Fees

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18ᵗʰ Annual International Conference on Literature
2-5 June 2025, Athens, Greece

The [Literature Unit](#) of the Athens Institute is organizing its **18ᵗʰ Annual International Conference on Literature, 2-5 June 2025, Athens, Greece** sponsored by the [Athens Journal of Philology](#). The conference is soliciting papers (in English only) from all areas of Literature and other related disciplines. You may participate as stream organizer, presenter of one paper, chair a session or observer. Please submit a proposal using the form available (https://www.atiner.gr/2025/FORM-LIT.doc).

Important Dates
- Abstract Submission: **11 February 2024**
- Acceptance of Abstract: **4 Weeks after Submission**
- Submission of Paper: **5 May 2024**

Academic Member Responsible for the Conference

- **Dr. Stamos Metzidakis**, Head, [Literature Research Unit](#), Athens Institute & Emeritus Professor of French and Comparative Literature, Washington University in Saint Louis, USA.

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Social Uncertainty associated with Covid-19 and Fertility in Colombia

By Victoria San Juan Bernuy[*], Fernando Ruiz-Vallejo[±] &
Patrizio Lodetti[°]

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented uncertainty to societies worldwide, with Latin America being no exception. In Colombia, the pandemic's arrival in March 2020 triggered a cascade of containment measures, including social distancing, border closures, and suspension of non-essential activities. This study investigates the impact of social uncertainty associated with COVID-19 on fertility in Colombia, based on a multi-method approach which combines digital demography tools with descriptive measures from birth and death records. Our research aims to contribute to the understanding of the pandemic's far-reaching consequences on demographic trends, highlighting the need for policymakers to address the complex interplay between health crises, social uncertainty, and fertility. By exploring the Colombian context, this study sheds light on the intricate relationships between COVID-19, social uncertainty, and fertility, providing valuable insights for policymakers and scholars alike.

Keywords: *COVID-19, social uncertainty, fertility, Colombia, Latin America, demographic trends.*

Introduction

Latin America a region, characterised by its diversity and dynamism encompasses over 20 countries with a total population of 650 million people (Celada, 2022). The onset of COVID-19 in this part of the world occurred in March 2020, marking the beginning of an unprecedented health crisis in the region. Governments implemented a series of containment measures such as social distancing, border closures, and the suspension of non-essential activities, aiming to curb the virus spread and prevent healthcare systems from becoming overwhelmed. In this context, fertility was affected, as social and economic uncertainty increased, impacting births negatively in most European countries (Aassve et al., 2021; Sobotka et al., 2021), China (Zhang & Li, 2021), and Japan (Ghaznavi et al., 2022) where low fertility scenarios were observed. In Latin America, while available studies identify a similar trend (Marteleto et al., 2023; Cabella y Pardo, 2022; Castro et al., 2022; Lima et al., 2022; UNFPA, 2021;

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Montaño Mendoza et al.,2020), heterogeneous impacts at subnational levels and for different social classes were also observed (Castro et al., 2022).

Moreover, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the media exerted a significant influence on the perception of uncertainty and its impact on fertility-related decisions. As the health crisis spread worldwide, the media became the primary source of information for the population, providing constant updates on the virus spread, containment measures, and potential treatments. However, this inundation of information also brought challenges such as the dissemination of fake news, conspiracy theories, and conflicting messages, contributing to increased uncertainty and anxiety in the population (Casino, 2022). This, in turn, may have affected motivations for parenthood, either by postponing (Zhao et al., 2024) or cancelling (Safdari-Dehcheshmeh et al., 2023) parenthood plans due to social isolation measures, feelings of distress, or uncertainty; or conversely, by accelerating the decision within stable partner relationships (Zhao et al., 2024).

Despite the influence of the media on social uncertainty associated with the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on fertility, research exploring this relationship is scarce, as has been done in the study of economic uncertainty and the role of the media in reproductive intentions (Guetto et al., 2022). There are not much studies investigating this relationship in the Latin American context. Therefore, this article aims to contribute to filling this gap by studying the association between social uncertainty generated by the Covid-19 pandemic through the media and fertility. Taking the Colombian case, the research aims, on one hand, to identify the relationship between the increase in Covid-19 news and the birth behavior occurring between October 2020 and December 2022. On the other hand, to analyze if this relationship varies according to age group, marital status, educational level, and previous parity of mothers.

In addition to this introduction, the article includes a section on research background regarding the impact of Covid-19 on fertility and the role of the media. Subsequently, the methodology is described, highlighting the use of digital demography in combination with a descriptive approach to births reported in Colombia's vital statistics between 2020 and 2022. The last two sections correspond to the presentation of results and the discussion derived from the findings of the study.

Impact of Covid-19 on Fertility

Research on how the pandemic has affected reproductive behaviour has primarily focused on high-income countries, mainly in Western Europe and North America. Data suggest a decline in intentions to have children, in line with the findings proposed by Aassve et al. (2020). In most developed countries, a significant reduction in the number of births was observed between November 2020 and February 2021, approximately nine months after the pandemic began. For example, in Spain, Portugal, and Italy, there were reductions of 20%, 14%, and 12%, respectively. However, countries like Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands and Norway did not experience significant declines. On average, the reduction in developed countries was 5.1% in November, 6.5% in December, and 8.9% in

January (Sobotka et al., 2021). In the United States, there was an 8% reduction in December 2020 compared to the same month the previous year, with greater reductions in areas most affected by the pandemic in terms of infection rates and mobility restrictions (Cohen, 2021).

Wilde et al. (2020), in the United States, used Google search data to estimate a 15% year-on-year decrease in births for November 2020, reflecting changes in search trends related to pregnancy and contraception. It was observed that the decline would be even greater in low-income households and minority groups, aligning with the idea that economic concerns more heavily impact reproductive behavior among those with fewer resources. This decline in fertility would be considerably larger than that observed during the Great Recession of 2008.

Studies on reproductive intentions also show a decrease in the desire to have children in the short term. In countries like Moldova (Emery & Koops, 2022) and Germany (Lindberg et al., 2020), this decrease was approximately one-third. Luppi et al. (2020) demonstrated that intentions to have children had decreased in Spain, France, Italy, Germany, and the United Kingdom, manifesting differently in each context. In Italy, declines in intentions to have children were mainly observed among young people with high educational levels under 30 years old, while in Germany, patterns were concentrated in areas with higher COVID-19 infection rates. A study conducted in Shanghai by Zhu et al. (2020) found no significant effects on reproductive intentions, especially among couples who trusted government and public health measures. It was observed that those planning to postpone conception were particularly concerned about the virus's impact on maternal and fetal health.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, before the COVID-19 pandemic, a general trend of declining fertility was already being observed. In several countries in the region, fertility rates were approaching replacement levels, around 2.1 children per woman (ECLAC, 2022). However, economic and social differences generated a heterogeneous landscape, with significant variations in fertility rates among different socioeconomic groups and geographical areas. Since the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, speculation has arisen about the potential effects of COVID-19 on fertility. Available information suggests a downward trend in fertility rates in several countries in the region. For example, in Colombia, a study showed a significant decrease in births towards the end of 2020 (Montaño Mendoza et al., 2021). Similarly, in Brazil, research in six of the country's largest cities found a decline in births between October 2020 and March 2021, with reductions of up to 20% in some cities such as Curitiba and Belo Horizonte (Lima et al., 2022). Despite this general trend, heterogeneous impacts are also observed at the subnational level and among social classes (Castro et al., 2022).

Media, Uncertainty and Fertility

One of the most notable effects of media presence was the generation of a climate of widespread uncertainty. The constant exposure to alarming news about the rise in cases, hospital saturation, and high mortality rates not only affected the perception of the virus-associated risk but also instilled doubts about the future and

stability of society as a whole. Striking images, sensational headlines, and the viral spread of unverified information contributed to increased levels of stress and anxiety in many individuals, creating an emotionally charged environment (Casino, 2022).

In this context, uncertainty may have extended to multiple aspects of people's daily lives, particularly those in isolation, including family planning and reproductive decisions. Individuals faced an unstable economic and labor landscape due to restrictions imposed to contain the virus spread. This economic instability could translate into financial concerns that directly influenced decisions about having children or expanding the family, much like how fake news might have affected perceptions about the vaccine, which, as confirmed, has no concrete effect on fertility itself (Wesselink et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the media also contributed to exacerbating labor and economic uncertainty, which was particularly relevant in contexts like Italy, one of the European countries most affected by the pandemic. Studies conducted from 2016 to 2020 in Italy showed significant changes in perceptions and desires to have children among the young population. Labor instability, exacerbated by the economic crisis stemming from the pandemic, was directly associated with a lower intention to have children in the short term, especially among those with temporary, remote, or vulnerable jobs (Luppi et al., 2022). This relationship between job stability and reproductive desires underscored the importance of economic factors in family and reproductive decision-making during crises.

In addition to the economic aspect, the media also influenced public perception about health and safety related to the pandemic and its impact on fertility. Disinformation spread through various media channels generated unfounded concerns about the safety of the COVID-19 vaccine and its potential effects on fertility. Although scientific data support the safety of vaccines (Wesselink et al., 2022), the spread of conspiracy theories and myths undermined public trust and contributed to some people's reluctance to get vaccinated, which in turn had implications for family planning and the perception of risk associated with reproduction during the pandemic (Gromski et al., 2020; Ullah, 2020).

The influence of the media on these dynamics is multifaceted. On one hand, the dissemination of accurate and up-to-date information can empower individuals to make informed decisions about their reproductive and family health. However, the presence of misinformation and alarming news can generate anxiety and reluctance in the population, especially on sensitive topics like fertility and reproduction (Mejia et al., 2020).

Materials and Methods

The current study aims to explore the impact of covid-related media news (which directly or indirectly generate uncertainty) and fertility in Colombia. The use of online media data represents a particularly relevant innovation for studies that strive to correlate media and demographic phenomena and media narratives. This study adopts a quantitative descriptive methodology and also regression

models to evaluate the existence of this association. The following are the details regarding the sources of data used:

- Online news press media: online articles from three national newspapers were consulted and collected, El Tiempo[1], El Espectador[2] and Portafolio[3].

The first two are the most consulted print media in the country, and the third is significant in the business field. The period for searching news articles was from January 1, 2020, to December 31, 2022. A total of 412298 publications were collected, of which 54.8% were from El Tiempo, 36.1% from El Espectador, and 9.1% from Portafolio.

For the data collection, web scraping algorithms were developed to transcribe online news data into databases. These algorithms operated meticulously, scanning through online articles published in targeted newspaper websites on a daily basis: from January 1, 2020, to December 31 2022. By using the capabilities of these algorithms, both the textual content of the article and essential metadata were gathered systematically, including authorship, subject of reference, publication dates, and more. This approach ensured the comprehensive acquisition of relevant data, laying a robust foundation for the research and analysis. In the end, it was possible to identify 49539 news articles related to Covid-19 in the three consulted online newspaper. Subsequently, for each newspaper, a press coverage indicator was built by dividing the numbers of Covid related news to the total amount of news published on a monthly Base. The percentage was estimated over the total number of news articles and classified by month.

- Administrative data related to births and deaths: Micro data from the vital statistics of the National Statistics Bureau (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística, DANE), both mortality and births for the years 2020, 2021, and 2022 (last available year), were processed. These events were classified by month, and in the case of births, additionally by age, marital status, education, and number of previous children reported by the mother. Additionally, for the construction of the comparison parameter, records for the previous three years, i.e., from 2017 to 2019, were processed to calculate the average value of deaths and births for each month-year.
- Other sources: information of unemployment rates was taken from the official estimates of the DANE.

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[1]Tiempo was founded on January 31, 1911 (Meneses, 2021). A report from 2020 indicates that it is the most consulted newspaper by the Colombian population, with a preference rate of 64.5%. (https:// mobimetrics.co/stats/los-periodicos-mas-leidos-por-los-colombianos/, date accessed: April 13, 2024).

[2]El Espectador is the oldest media outlet in the country. It was founded on March 22, 1887 (Meneses, 2021). According to the Mobimetrics study, 41.4% of the population declared it as the most read newspaper (https://mobimetrics.co/stats/los-periodicos-mas-leidos-por-los-colombianos/, date accessed: April 13, 2024).

[3]Portafolio is a business and finance newspaper, founded in 1993. According to the aforementioned study, 9.6% of the population expresses their preference for it as their favorite newspaper (https:// mobimetrics.co/stats/los-periodicos-mas-leidos-por-los-colombianos/, date accessed: April 13, 2024).

Regarding the methodology, in addition to descriptive analysis, panel regression models were used to provide an inferential perspective to the analysis, with the possibility to also take into account contextual variables, such as the weight of Covid-19 mortality on overall mortality and the unemployment rate, in explaining the emerging associations. In the current analyses, each observation corresponds to the month of the reference period and the models are elaborated in three progressive stages: i) including only media coverage, ii) adding socio-demographic variables to model i, iii) adding contextual variables to model ii. iv) This last full version of the model was used to explain variations in births for the most socio-demographic groups identified by the descriptive analysis. Throughout the process, special attention was paid to improving the model's goodness of fit and to changes in the direction and strength of the observed associations.

Variables

The dependent variable in this study is the increase in the number of births for each month during the reference period (January 2020 to December 2022) compared to the average number of births for the same month during the baseline period from 2017 to 2019, which serves as the reference value. Negative values indicate a reduction in births compared to this comparison value. From this point in the paper onwards, the dependent variable will be called the Weighted Variation In Births (WVB). Births were related nine months after the calendar year, under the assumption of the pregnancy period leading to a live birth. For example, births occurring in December 2020 correspond to conceptions in March 2020, the onset of the pandemic. Therefore, in the observation window of 2020-2022, the last month of observed births is December 2022, which accounts for conceptions in March of the same year. Additionally, calendar-birth months were classified into five sub-periods of the health emergency, defined based on measures taken by the national government (see Table 1). These periods were:

- Pre-Covid-19: the months immediately before confinement, corresponding
- to January and February 2020.
- Strict confinement: a period of restrictive and extreme confinement during
- March, April, and May 2020.
- Confinement with exceptions: confinement measures were relaxed for some essential functions other than healthcare personnel (June-August 2020).
- Selective confinement: a period of progressive opening, under a scheme of limited outing times. Corresponds to the months from September 2020 to February 2021.
- Reopening: generalized opening occurred in Colombia between March and June 31, 2022, when the President of Colombia, Iván Duque, declared the end of the pandemic.

Table 1. *Relationship between Calendar and Birth Months during the Health Emergency in Colombia*

Period	Month	Year	Month of Birth	Year of Birth
Pre-Covid	January	2020	October	2020
	February	2020	November	2020
Strict confinement	March	2020	December	2020
	April	2020	January	2021
	May	2020	February	2021
Confinement with exceptions:	June	2020	March	2021
	July	2020	April	2021
	August	2020	May	2021
Selective confinement	September	2020	June	2021
	October	2020	July	2021
	November	2020	August	2021
	December	2020	September	2021
	January	2021	October	2021
	February	2021	November	2021
Reopening	March	2021	December	2021
	April	2021	January	2022
	May	2021	February	2022
	June	2021	March	2022
	July	2021	April	2022
	August	2021	May	2022
	September	2021	June	2022
	October	2021	July	2022
	November	2021	August	2022
	December	2021	September	2022
	January	2022	October	2022
	February	2022	November	2022
	March	2022	December	2022

Source: own elaboration

Moreover, independent variables were included to analyze the variation of birth months compared to the average birth month during the period 2017-2019. The following table describes the independent variables (aggregated and monthly measured), and the source from which they were taken.

Table 2. *Definition, Operation, and Source of Information for Independent Variables*

Group of variables	Variable	Definition	Categories/Unit	Source
Press media	Covid-19 Press Coverage	Percentage of Covid-19 online news out of the total online news published	Percentage	Press media from El Tiempo, El Espectador y Portafolio. Data collection via web scraping algorithms.
Socio-demographic	Age groups	Five-year age groups of the mother of the live birth	10-14, 15-19, 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, 40-44, 45-49, 50-54 years-old.	Vital Statistics. Births
	Marital status	Marita status of the mother of the live birth	Cohabitation of 2+ years, Cohabitation below 2 years, Separated/Divorced, Widow, Single, Married	Vital Statistics. Births
	Educational Attainment	Educational level of the mother of the live birth	Primary or less, Secondary, Technical/Technological, Higher Education	Vital Statistics. Births
	Previous Parity	Number of children prior to the reported birth	0, 1, 2, 3+	Vital Statistics. Births
Context	Percentage of Covid-19 Deaths	Percentage of deaths associated with Covid-19 out of the total deaths in the month	Percentage	Vital Statistics. Deaths
	Unemployment Rate	Percentage ratio of unemployed individuals to the labor force.	Rate	DANE Estimates

Source: own elaboration

Results

The findings are presented in three sections. The first section describes the results about the news published by the three consulted media outlets and the press coverage of Covid-19 related news. The second section, analyzes press coverage trends related to births, based on the sociodemographic variables mentioned in the methodological section. Finally, the third section presents the findings of the regression models.

Press Coverage of Covid-19 Related News and Weighted Variation in Births

According to Figure 1, during the initial months of the lockdown, media coverage of COVID-19 surged dramatically, with Portafolio being the most prominent source at 50.6% in March 2020, followed by El Tiempo at 39.5%, and El Espectador in third place at 21.8%. From that point, a downward trend in media coverage is observed, interrupted by spikes that increased these percentages, such as in January 2021 during the selective isolation period, and in April 2021, January or April 2022, during the selective isolation stage. At the end of the period, following the end of the health emergency, very low coverage levels are observed.

Figure 1. *Press Coverage of COVID-19 news in the Three Online Media Outlets. Colombia, 2020-2022*
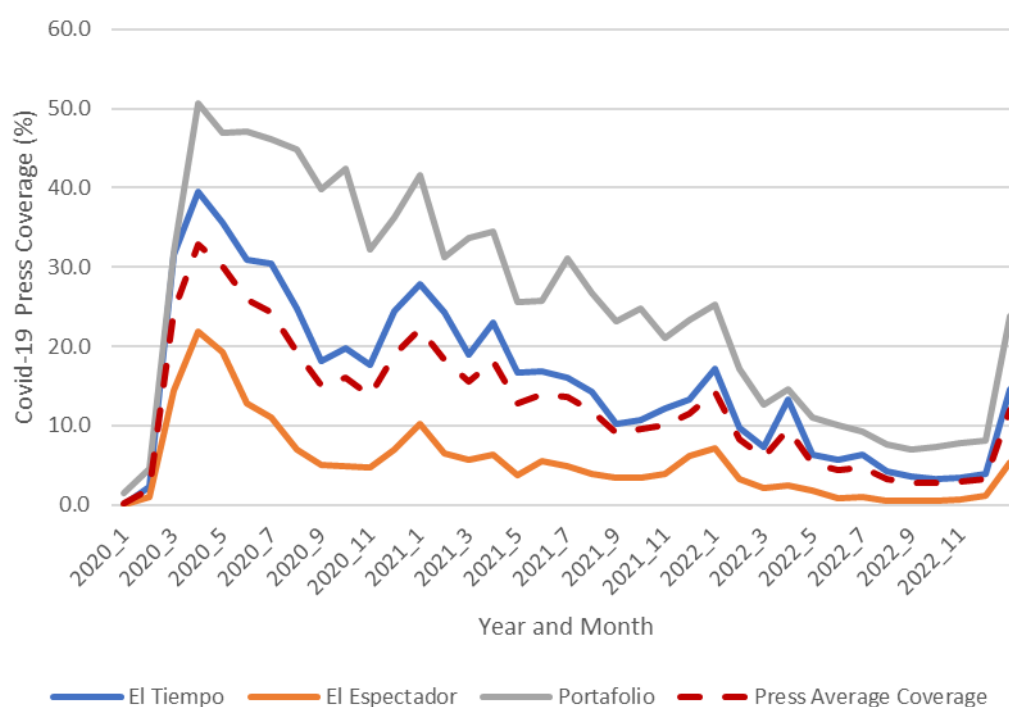
Source: own elaboration based on online press media data collected via webscrapping (from El Tiempo, El Espectador and Portafolio) and data from DANE (vital statistics and unemployment indicators).

When comparing online press coverage (using the average) with the weighted variation in births, an interesting pattern emerges. Firstly, there is a widespread scenario of a reduction in the number of births throughout the observation period (see the violet line in Figure 2). Secondly, the trend shows an intensification of the reduction in births from October, as a result of the first month of lockdown (March 2020), paralleled with the significant increase of COVID-19 news. Moreover, the decrease in births slows down coincide with the reduction in the press coverage of COVID-19 news. In December 2020 and January 2021, again, the decrease in births intensifies simultaneously with a new peak in press coverage of COVID-19

news. A similar pattern is observed in March/April 2021 and November/December of the same year, where press coverages exhibit small peaks.

Figure 2. *Press Coverage of COVID-19 News and Monthly weighted Variation in Births over the reference period. Colombia, 2020-2022*

Source: own elaboration based on online press media data collected via webscrapping (from El Tiempo, El Espectador and Portafolio) and data from DANE (vital statistics and unemployment indicators). The Role of Sociodemographic Features

When including sociodemographic variables, variations in the shape and/or intensities of the previously described pattern are observed. Figures 3-6 display differentiated trends according to age (Figure 3), marital status (Figure 4), education level (Figure 5), and number of prior children (Figure 6). Regarding mothers' age, throughout the period, the greatest reductions are observed among those under 20 years old. Conversely, older age groups (40-44 years) exhibited positive values and did not show some correspondence with media coverage behavior (see red line).

Figure 3. *Press Coverage of COVID-19 News and Monthly weighted Variation in Births, According to Mothers' Age Groups. Colombia, 2020-2022*
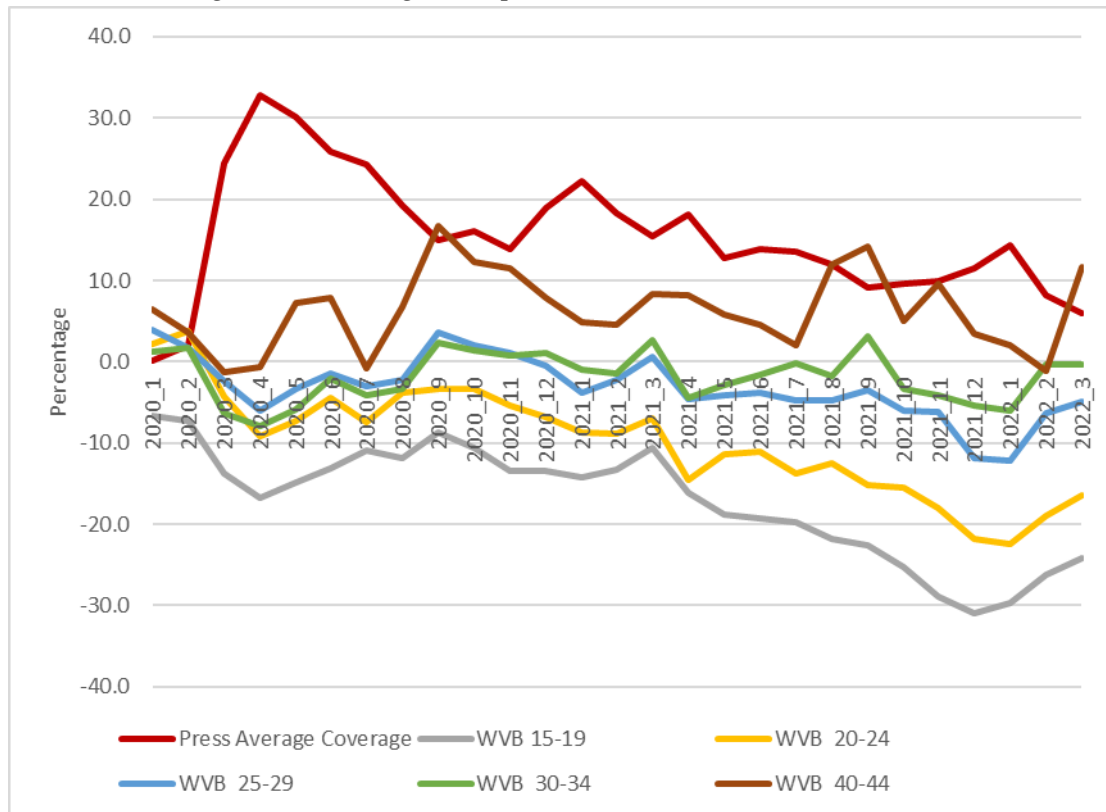
Source: own elaboration based on online press media data collected via webscrapping (from El Tiempo, El Espectador and Portafolio) and data from DANE (vital statistics and unemployment indicators)

Marital status is another variable that moderates the parallelism between births and the media coverage of COVID-19. With the exception of mothers in a common-law union for more than two years, a reduction in births is reported in the other categories compared to the reference period (2017-2019). Among these, single and married mothers experienced the greatest decrease in births, especially during peaks of increased media coverage (for example, March 2020, March-April 2021, and December 2021 and January 2022).

Figure 4. *Press Coverage of COVID-19 News and Monthly weighted Variation in Births, According to Mothers' Marital Status. Colombia, 2020-2022*
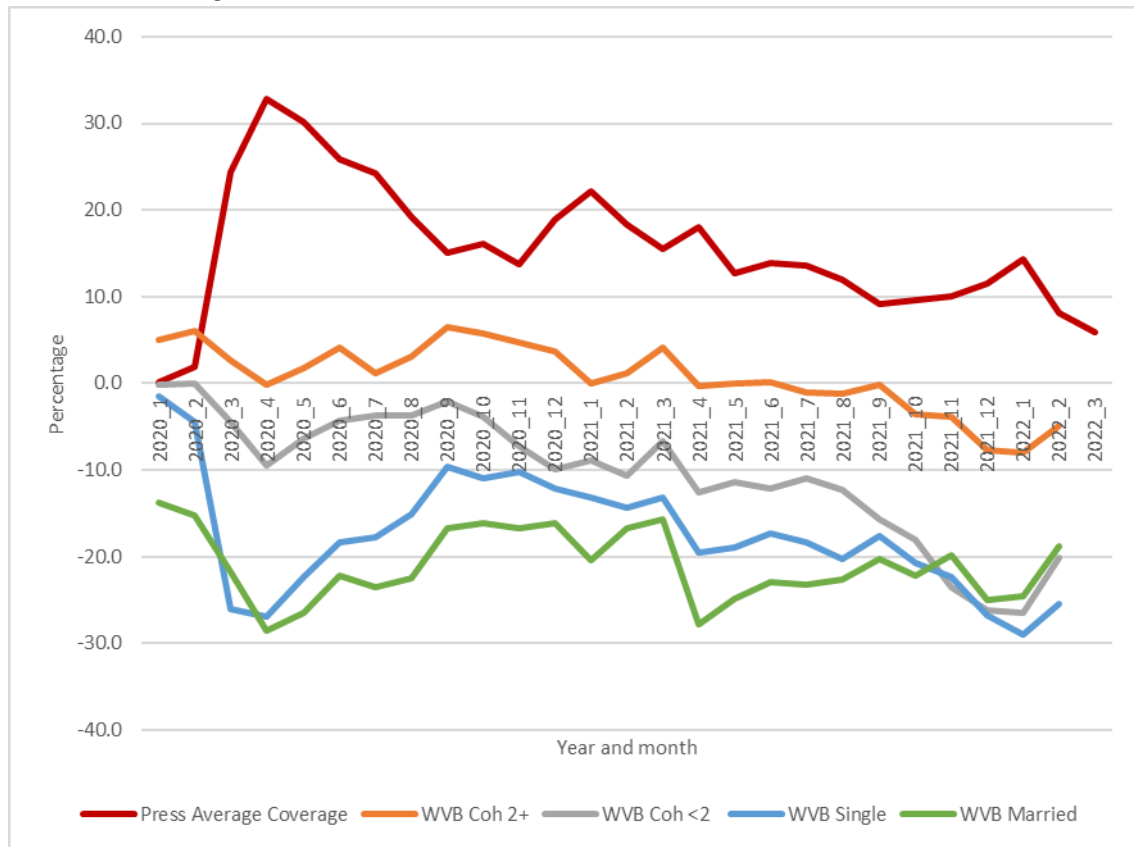
Source: own elaboration based on online press media data collected via webscrapping (from El Tiempo, El Espectador and Portafolio) and data from DANE (vital statistics and unemployment indicators).

Analyzing education level in the relationship between media coverage and births is also revealing. A cross-cutting behavior is observed, as the onset of the health emergency and media coverage coincides with an intense reduction in births among mothers with technical/technological studies or higher education, followed by a deceleration of births during the period of reopening. On the other hand, in lower education groups (primary or less and secondary), the behavior is opposite; there is a lesser reduction in births at the beginning of the lockdown, but a significant reduction during the reopening period.

Figure 5. *Press Coverage of COVID-19 News and Monthly weighted Variation in Births, according to the Educational Level of Mothers. Colombia, 2020-2022*
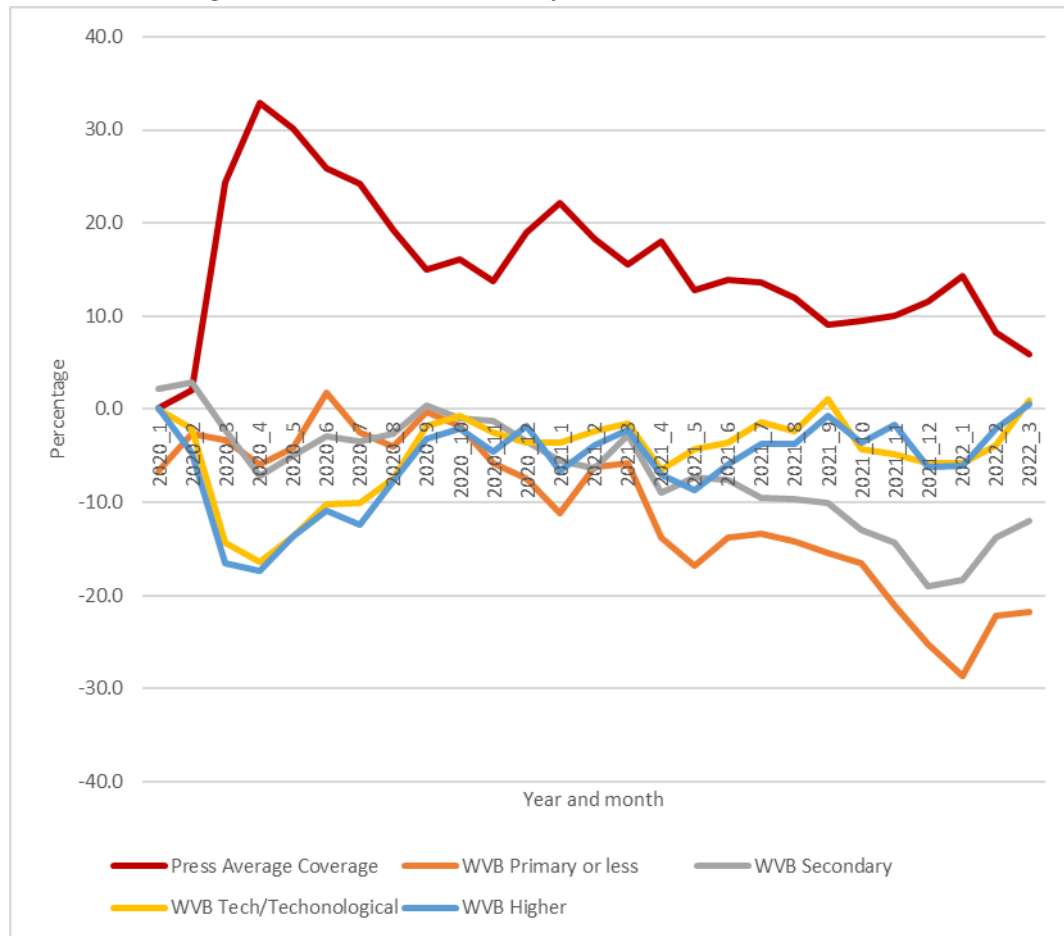
Source: own elaboration based on online press media data collected via webscrapping (from El Tiempo, El Espectador and Portafolio) and data from DANE (vital statistics and unemployment indicators)

Finally, the number of previous children also reveals an interesting pattern. During the confinement period, when media coverage was most intense, it was observed that women without previous children significantly reduced births, as did those with only one child (to a lesser extent). In contrast, women with 2 or 3 or more children increased births compared to the reference period-month. However, the trend in these groups of women changes starting in 2021, when a decline in births begins to be recorded, aligning with the trend of women without children or with one child, corresponding to a period of low media coverage of COVID-19. At the end of the observed period, a slight increase in the overall reduction of births is identified, between January and March 2022 (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. *Press Coverage of COVID-19 News and Monthly weighted Variation in Births, according to the Number of Previous Children of the mothers. Colombia, 2020-2022*
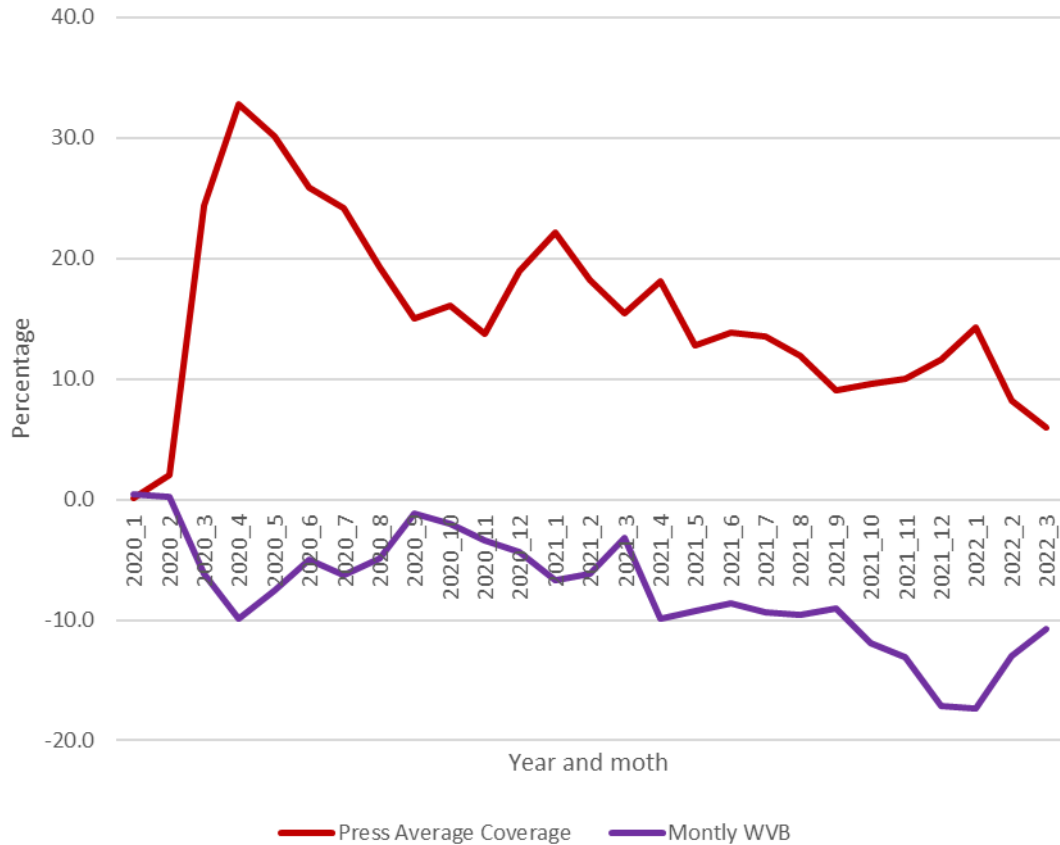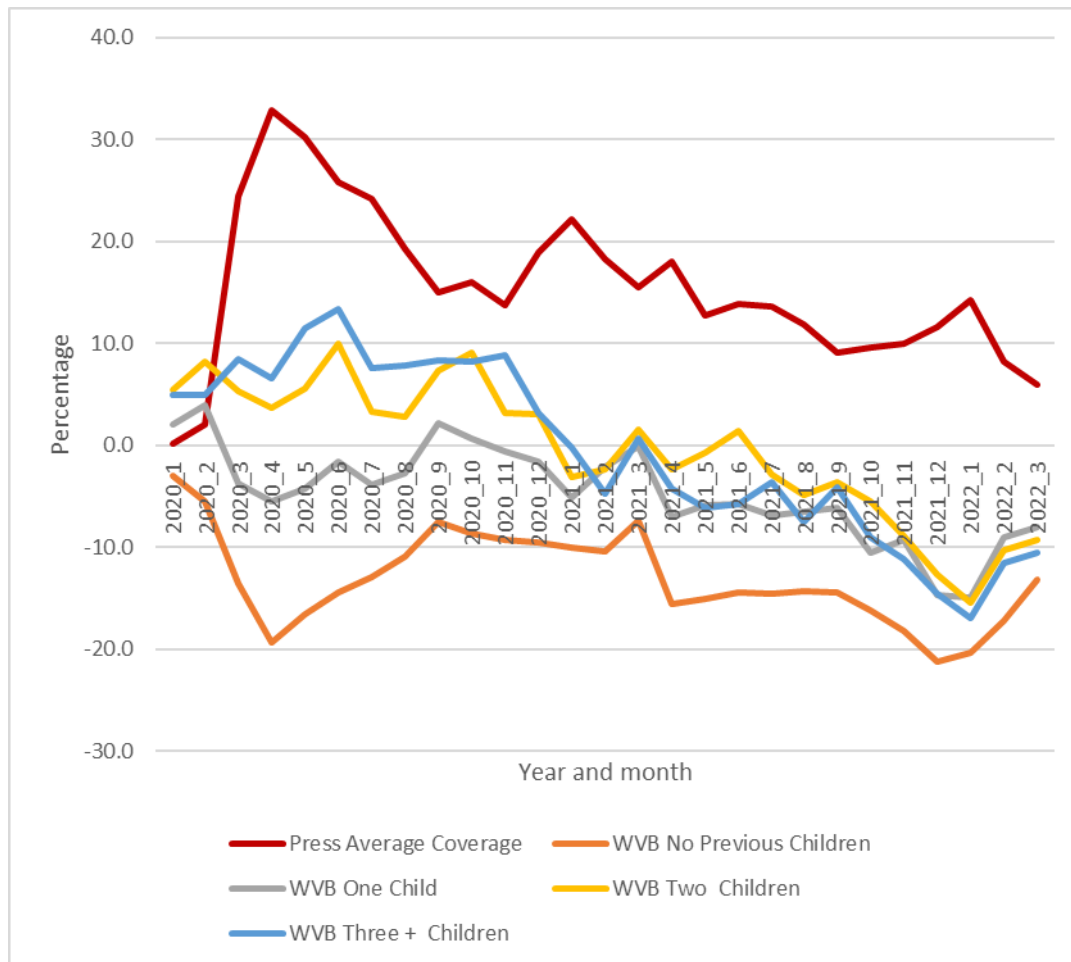

Source: own elaboration based on online press media data collected via webscrapping (from El Tiempo, El Espectador and Portafolio) and data from DANE (vital statistics and unemployment indicators) Panel Regression Models Results.

Regression and Model Results

To conclude the results section, the findings of the regression models are presented. Table 3 includes the first stage of the regression models, which aimed to explore the association between the total press coverage of Covid-19 news and the monthly weighted variation in births. Model 1 shows a positive coefficient (0.0014), but this association is not significant. However, this relationship begins to change when two fundamental contextual variables are included: the monthly percentage of COVID-19 deaths and the monthly unemployment rate. In the first case, although the coefficient for COVID-19 press coverage remains non- significant (model 2), it already exhibits a negative sign, which becomes significant in the second case when the unemployment rate is included (model 3). In this latter model, the coefficient for

media coverage is -0.3453, significant at the 90% level (p-value of 0.0850), indicating an inverse association between the intensification of COVID-19 media coverage and births, after controlling for the impact of COVID-19 deaths and unemployment. The same way, the goodness-of-fit indicators (see the bottom of Table 3) show an improvement for model 3 with an R-squared of 0.1780, compared to the previous models (0.0036 for model 2 and 0.0000 for model 1), indicating the mediating role of the media coverage variable when finding its association with the birth pattern during the pandemic period.

Table 4 shows the findings of the complete model (m3) with the dependent variable selected for sociodemographic groups according to age (models 4-10), marital status (models 11-14), educational level (models 16-19), and the mothers' previous parity (models 20-23).

In relation to age groups, the inverse association between pandemic media coverage and births, already identified in the previous section, is only maintained in the 25-29 and 30-34 age groups (models 6 and 7, respectively). In the other age groups, the coefficients were not significant. However, it is noteworthy that in the under-20 age groups (M4 and M5), a significant association was observed with the unemployment variable, indicating a positive relationship; to be specific, higher unemployment corresponds to a greater increase in births. On the other hand, the 45-49 age group did not exhibit a significant association with pandemic media coverage, but it was positive, showing that for this age group, births increased compared to the reference period.

Marital status set significant results for single women (model 11) and married women (model 14). In these groups, after controlling for the impact of COVID-19 deaths and unemployment, a negative relationship was also found between pandemic media coverage and births, as indicated by the descriptive results (Figure 4). Regarding educational level, the findings show a trend similar to that found in the marital status groups, as births among women with higher education (models 18 and 19) are negatively related to pandemic media coverage. A similar pattern was identified for women without previous children (model 20) and those with one child before the reported birth during the pandemic (model 21), as a negative relationship was also identified in these groups, indicating that higher monthly media coverage of the pandemic was associated with a decrease in births compared to the reference period (average month-year 2017-2019).

Table 3. *Regression models coefficients for the weighted variation of monthly births (WVB) during the Covid-19 pandemic. Colombia, 2020-2022*

	M1					M2					M3				
	Coeff	Robust Std error	P>|t|	Low interval	Upper interval	Coeff	Robust Std error	P>|t|	Low interval	Upper interval	Coeff	Robust Std error	P>|t|	Low interval	Upper interval
Covid-19 Press Coverage	0,0014	0,1195	0,9910	-0,2447	0,2474	-0,0062	0,1244	0,9610	-0,2629	0,2505	-0,3453	0,1920	0,0850	-0,7426	0,0519
Covid-19 % cause of deaths						0,0218	0,0741	0,7710	-0,1312	0,1748	0,0001	0,0695	0,9980	-0,1436	0,1438
Unemployment rate											1,1073	0,5012	0,0370	0,0705	2,1440
Const	-7,6064	2,0617	0,0010	-11,8526	-3,3601	-7,8725	2,2868	0,0020	-12,5922	-3,1528	-18,8734	5,4124	0,0020	-30,0698	-7,6770
Model fit															
Observations	27					27					27				
R-squared	0,0000					0,0036					0,1780				
Adj R-squared	-0,0400					-0,0794					0,0708				

Source: own elaboration based on press media data collected via webscrapping (from El Tiempo, El Espectador and Portafolio) and data from DANE (vital statistics and unemployment indicators)

Table 4. *Regression Models Coefficients for the weighted Variation of Monthly Births for selected sociodemographic Groups (WVB) during the Reference Period. Colombia, 2020-2022*

Dimension	Model	Group of WVB	Covid-19 Press Coverage	Covid-19 % cause of deaths	Unemployment rate	Observations	R-squared	Adj R-squared
			Coefficient and significance				**Model fit**	
Age groups	M4	15-19	-0,3960	0,0273	1,8685***	27	0,2844	0,1911
	M5	20-24	-0,4250	-0,0596	1,7490**	27	0,2265	0,1256
	M6	25-29	-0,3053*	0,0043	0,8371*	27	0,1540	0,0436
	M7	30-34	-0,3092**	0,0497	0,2445	27	0,3681	0,2857
	M8	35-39	-0,1549	0,0543	-0,0381	27	0,1264	0,0124
	M9	40-44	-0,2114	0,0243	0,1445	27	0,0753	-0,0453
	M10	45-49	0,2776	-0,0458	-1,5268	27	0,0562	-0,0669
Marital Status	M11	Single	-0,8447***	0,0847	1,6305**	27	0,3476	0,2625
	M12	Cohabitation 2+	-0,1972	0,0016	0,8232*	27	0,1564	0,0464
	M13	Cohabitation <2	-0,3903	0,0058	2,0338**	27	0,2936	0,2014
	M14	Married	-0,3309**	-0,0201	0,2226	27	0,2801	0,1862
Educational Attainment	M16	Primary or less	-0,0718	-0,0524	1,7690	27	0,3390	0,2493
	M17	Secondary	-0,3382	-0,0057	1,4220	27	0,2089	0,1057
	M18	Technical/Technological	-0,4826***	0,1122***	-0,0854	27	0,7420	0,7083
	M19	Higher	-0,4635***	0,0678	-0,1811	27	0,6885	0,6479
Previous Parity	M20	None	-0,4579**	0,0293	0,9104*	27	0,2208	0,1192
	M21	One	-0,3337*	-0,0077	1,1359**	27	0,1821	0,0755
	M22	Two	-0,1811	-0,0328	1,5680**	27	0,2791	0,1851
	M23	Three or more	-0,0328	-0,1044	2,0050	27	0,4272	0,3525

Source: own elaborations. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Discussion

In line with the emerging literature on the impact of COVID-19 on fertility in Latin America (Marteleto et al., 2023; Cabella and Pardo, 2022; Castro et al., 2022; Lima et al., 2022; UNFPA, 2021; Montaño Mendoza et al., 2020), the present study reports a reduction in births between October 2020 (corresponding to conceptions at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic) and December 2022. However, this decline occurs within the context of a generalized reduction in births experienced by several countries in the region (ECLAC, 2022), even before the pandemic. Despite this, descriptive analysis established a similar trend between the weighted variation in births and the proportion of COVID-19 online news over the total online publications in three major Colombian newspapers: El Tiempo, El Espectador, and Portafolio.

The similarity of the two series showed an increase in the negative variation of births when the proportion of COVID-19 news increased (as observed in April 2020; in January, April, June, and November 2021, as well as in January 2024). Regression models also confirmed the association, showing that an increase in births during the pandemic is associated with a decrease in COVID-19 news coverage .It is important to note that this relationship is not direct, as it only appeared when contextual variables (COVID-19 deaths and unemployment rate) were included in the model, highlighting the mediating role of social uncertainty, expressed through intensified pandemic coverage, as found in studies on the media's effect during economic crises (Guetto et al., 2023).

The aforementioned association is heterogeneous across different social groups. In this regard, both descriptive analysis and regression models showed that the relationship is more robust for the 25-29 and 30-34 age groups, which currently have the highest specific fertility rates in Colombia (DANE, 2023). This suggests a potential impact on future births due to the reduction during the pandemic associated with greater social uncertainty transmitted by the media. A similar situation was identified for single and married women, and for women with higher education levels; unlike the 25-34 age groups, these do not correspond to the marital statuses with the most births, such as free unions (DANE, 2023). Conversely, the association was significant for women with no previous children or only one child, who significantly contribute to Colombia's total fertility rate (Pardo et al., 2024).

Addressing the research questions that motivated the study, a negative association was found between social uncertainty generated by the media and births during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, it was demonstrated that this media influence is not received uniformly across all social groups, with certain groups, in terms of age, marital status, educational level, and previous parity, being more intensely impacted by social uncertainty in terms of fertility. These results are particularly relevant in low-fertility societies like Colombia, which has a TFR of 1.4 children per woman according to the 2024 estimate by DANE (2024), and is beginning to collectively discuss the challenges of demographic sustainability.

Conclusions

The current study corroborates existing literature on the impact of COVID-19 on fertility in Latin America, highlighting a reduction in births from October 2020 to December 2022 within a broader trend of declining birth rates. A notable correlation was found between decreased births and increased COVID-19 news coverage, suggesting that media-induced social uncertainty influenced fertility decisions. This effect was particularly pronounced among women aged 25-34, single and married women, and those with higher education levels. While the study's limitations prevent causal conclusions, the findings emphasize the need for future research to better understand media effects on fertility and reproductive health in low-fertility societies like Colombia.

Finally, the study's limitations should be noted, as it is not possible to establish causal relationships based on the sources and techniques used. Future research is recommended to generate data sources that allow for individual attribution of the media's contribution to social uncertainty and its impact on actual fertility, reproductive preferences, and social conditions for the full exercise of the right to family planning and sexual and reproductive health.

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Linguistic and Cultural Adaptation of the Russophone Migrant Women

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Based on individual and group interviews, as well as on written sources, this study focused on female practices of linguistic and cultural adaptation in immigration. In Russophone families, women play the central role in creating a sense of home away from home through preservation of cultural traditions and community connections. At the same time, they face numerous challenges such as discrimination and language barrier. In some cases, they also become sole breadwinners, thus bearing the double load of occupational and household duties. The women's resilience and dedication contribute to family stability and well-being, serving as a source of inspiration for the young. Russophone immigrant women often influence family language policies by deciding which language/s they speak to the children. The choice of home language/s often depends on such factors as fluency in different languages and beliefs about cultural heritage. Expansion of language repertoires typical of Russophone immigrant families leads to translanguaging and code mixing. An initial choice between the native language and the language of the new country may gradually change, impacting children's linguistic and cultural development. On the other hand, children's integration into the local society and cultural hybridization affects family language policies. Besides occupational and linguistic challenges, Russophone women are sometimes confronted with ethnic discrimination. As a result, some feel ashamed of or try to hide their background, while others seek support through social networks or online communities when offline communication with the co-ethnics is limited.

Introduction

Since immigration is a stressful life event for adults and children, it often proves a hard test for families. On the one hand, in the Soviet period women made a leap in emancipation competing with men in terms of education and career targets; on the other hand, the popular perception of gender roles in the family remained largely patriarchal and conservative (Peri 2018, Varga-Harris 2019). The need to excel at work, participate in public life did not free women of the burden of household duties. Women were expected to be skillful housekeepers, caring wives, and the main educators of the children. The abundance of obligations drained women and in many ways made them feel and behave patronizingly

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towards men (Engel, Posadskaya-Vanderbeck 1998). The clash of the "Soviet super-woman" and the lazy and "good-for-nothing man" was a popular topic of the Soviet jokelore (Antoshchuk, Gewinner 2020). The shuttle trade, often underestimated due to its seemingly small scale, emerged as a significant aspect of Russian consumer trade in the 1990s, primarily driven by women, with Mukhina's (2014) study shedding light on their motivations, experiences, and the broader social impact, revealing how gender dynamics shaped the transition period from communism to market economies and highlighting the disparities between market rhetoric and reality.

Paradoxically, it was the reformist Mikhail Gorbachev who declared as a societal goal to bring women back home so that they could act as wives and mothers without having to seek employment. This paved the way to overtly discriminatory attitudes to women and policies developed in the Russian post-Soviet labor market (Riabova, Ovcharova 2016). These views were expressed officially and went hand in hand with rejection of feminism. Even in emigration, interviews with older women reveal common themes of social suffering, including trauma of World War II, poor living conditions in the Soviet Union, scarcity of resources, and fear of persecution, all of which influenced their sense of identity (Pushkareva 2013). These interviews show a prevalent feeling of disconnection from the future, highlighting the importance of life stability (de Medeiros et al. 2015). However, in the first post-Soviet years, when Russians did not travel much, the myth that everybody living abroad was affluent still lingered on.

Moreover, women themselves dismissed feminism as inapplicable in the Russian situation. In the 1970s nearly 90 per cent of the women were employed. After the demise of the Soviet Union these numbers dropped, but most women could not afford to stay at home even if they wanted to and sought alternative means of earning a living, for example, in other parts of the former Soviet Union (Kangas et al. 2023, Kosmarskaya 2022). For many marrying a foreigner seemed to be the only reasonable alternative, promising stability and affluence. Matchmaking agencies opened in many towns, helping their clients to write letters to their suitors (some of the brides did not speak any other languages but Russian). The agencies organized photo-sessions and even distributed texts explaining specific features of the "national character" of potential grooms (Heyse 2011). As a result, many a disappointment awaited "Russian brides" who found upon arrival in their spouse's country that their husbands could not afford the luxuries they had dreamt about (Cvajner 2019). The most common problems encountered by Russian-speaking immigrants is difficulties in finding jobs due to incompatibility of skills or impossibility of practicing their profession in the new country. This is common among the highly educated, reluctant to retrain and/or learn new skills in the occupations which are in demand in the local labor market (Sverdljuk 2010, 2016). Sivoplyasova and Gafurova (2022) claim that the number of Russians moving abroad for marriage and family creation is increasing, particularly towards Eastern countries like Korea, China, and Japan. Recent years have seen a shift in motivations, with moral and psychological factors playing a significant role. Additionally, there is a shift in the marriage market infrastructure, with the emergence of dating sites alongside traditional marriage agencies.

In the Soviet period interethnic marriages were encouraged because they were regarded as contributors to the gradual disappearance of differences between the peoples populating the country. Soviet ideology viewed intermarriages as more progressive because they were less subject to the hold of traditional values; moreover, they reinforced Russification as partners would often use Russian as a home language (Gorenburg 2006: 149–150). Intermarriages with foreigners were very rare in the Soviet period, because few people were allowed or had a chance to maintain international contacts. Furthermore, until Perestroika, marrying a Westerner was akin to treason, and could have adverse effect on the career and social status of the "defecting" bride's family members remaining in the USSR. However, in the post-Soviet period transnational marriage migration evolved into one of the chief forms of mobility for women. Ryazantsev and Sivoplyasova (2020) state that "Russian brides" are primarily women from post-Soviet nations who speak Russian and have a Slavic look, creating a kind of brand on the worldwide marriage market. There are different models for finding foreign husbands: through match-making agencies, independent search on the internet, personal meetings through work or during vacations, and through family members or friends residing abroad. Along with the opportunity to study abroad, Russophone girls have gained a chance for a more careful selection of their future, including search for a spouse, and entering same-sex relationships and partnerships.

Societal expectations of gender roles are often expressed by the media and the media shapes them. Shevchenko and Lachover (2023) examine media representations of 1.5 generation post-Soviet women in Israel using a special issue of the periodical *La'isha* [Woman], highlighting four discourses shaping women's identity (nationality, Russianness, transforming into an Israeli, successfulness). They argue that the magazine portrays them as successful symbols of Western neoliberal feminism within the context of Israeli gender norms and ethno-national identity. Other possible identities are either deemed uninteresting or denied the label of "successful".

Identity in mixed families is a multifaceted concept influenced by interactions with persons with diverse cultural backgrounds and the evolving nature of language use in which code mixing and translanguaging become the norm. Everyday practices in mixed families are inseparable from negotiations and attempts to find common grounds. Sometimes they cause confusion and result in miscommunication; yet they also offer opportunities for personal growth and intercultural understanding.

The goal of the present study is to explore Russophone women's narratives and conversations in online discussions in order to trace evolution of their identity under the influence of migration.

Starting the project, we posed the following research questions:

- How do language dynamics impact the social integration of Russophone female emigrants in their host countries?
- What role does the Russian language play in the communication patterns and social interactions of female emigrants within their families compared to their interactions outside familial circles?

- How do Russian-speaking female emigrants explore linguistic and cultural differences in their host countries, and how does this affect their daily activities and social interactions?
- What are the multifaceted roles that Russian-speaking female emigrants assume in their unique situation between two cultures?
- How do women balance traditional expectations with the realities of their new environment?
- How do the experiences of Russian-speaking female emigrants shed light on the complexities of identity, belonging, and adaptation in cross-cultural settings?

Materials and Methods

Our material was drawn from numerous in-depth biographic interviews the authors conducted in Australia, Finland, Greece, Israel, Italy, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, UK, and USA. Some of them were audio- and others video-recorded and later transcribed. For close analysis we chose 55 interviews. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and its anonymity (in the excerpts from the interviews they are marked with initials in bold). Furthermore, we monitored various online discussion forums and analyzed threads in which women shared their experiences of adapting to their new environment. We listed themes related to their search for new identities and a sense of home. We also examined 35 oral narratives and written documents created by the Russian women who write fiction and non-fiction abroad.

The methods we relied on are thematic and motif analyses, as well as biography studies, which are often used in qualitative research (e.g., Fuhse, Mützel 2011, Herz et al. 2015, Knox et al. 2006, Kuckartz, Rädiker 2022, Mey, Mruck 2020, Pushkareva 2019). Thematic analysis originated in psychology. It is used to systematically identify, organize, and offer insight into patterns of meaning across a data set (Braun, Clarke 2012). Focusing on meaning found across the chosen data set, enables the researcher to find and make sense of shared meanings and experience. Motif analysis is frequently used in folkloristics and relies on the classical index of elementary motifs compiled by S. Thompson. Although his purpose was to describe traditional world folklore in the abstract form (Thompson 1955-1958), it proved effective in the analysis of contemporary narratives (see, e.g., Fialkova, Yelenevskaya 2007; Uther 1996). For a more thorough analysis, we chose specific themes based on their frequency in the interviews and other sources we have gathered. It was important for us to triangulate both sources for analysis and methods to ensure that the phenomena we study are not random, although even a single instance can validate its presence in the research material.

Intermarriage as an Adventure

The process of language acculturation is a route to achieving economic prosperity for immigrants, in particular for those with a high level of education. However, when women undergo acculturation at a swifter pace than their partners, it challenges traditional gender roles within the economic sphere (Kisselev et al. 2010). Intermarriage can be seen as an adventure in cultural discovery, personal growth, and building relationships across differences. It offers the opportunity for individuals to broaden their perspectives, learn about new customs and traditions, and form connections with people from different backgrounds. Braux (2015) encourages a nuanced exploration beyond stereotypes, addressing issues of prostitution, trafficking, and bi-national marriages between Turkish citizens and women from Russia and Ukraine, shedding light on deeply ingrained prejudices. Seeking for a Russian wife might also mean seeking for an old-type traditional woman dedicated to the household and satisfied with financial security and stability for herself and her children. Yet as far as the Russian women are concerned, the traditions are interrelated with full emancipation, self-consciousness and independence.

Russian brides are often seen as creatures seeking a gilded cage, complete security, and fulfillment of all their wishes, which they are legally entitled to in the East (see, e.g., the documentary series *Vostochnye zheny* 'Eastern Wives' and *Russkie zheny* 'Russian Wives' on Youtube). In exchange, these women are willing to tolerate their husbands' polygamy. The primary reason for this ambivalence is the domestic family model's turmoil. Many young women with no education or previous career leave Russia, and their grooms are frequently middle-aged men willing to start a family. Besides financial security, for Russian women today there is one more vitally important reason to search for partners abroad: in their home country there is a shortage of men who maintain healthy-life habits and do not indulge in excessive alcohol consumption, heavy smoking, and risky sexual behavior. Moreover, unlike Russian men, who see a woman's child from a previous marriage as an obstacle, foreigners are often willing to adopt their brides' children.

Stories of Russian women managing their life away from home appear in many novels and novelettes by the authors who themselves have gone through migrant experience. Life stories of women married to Austrian men are collected by Barkan (2017). She shows that Russian women behave differently from their western peers: some dedicate their lives to children, others to husbands, and some dare concentrate on themselves, which is a break-away from the Russian vision of an "ideal woman" and requires courage. Geier (2019) narrates her journey from Ukraine to Germany where she married a German, became a famous translator of the Russian classic literature, especially Dostoevsky, and spent her time between the languages. For her, translation is a form of breathing.

A third generation Germanist with a Ph.D. and an MBA diploma, a graduate from a German university, Katinskaya (a penname; 2023) has managed language centers in North Rhine-Westphalia. Born in Yaroslavl, central Russia, she won grants for trips to German universities. Inspired by her internship in Konstanz, she debuted with the novel "Time of Pickled Cucumbers." Now, she is raising

multilingual twins with her Franco-German spouse who encourages her to stay true to her identity. She narrates adventures of a provincial girl who came to study in Germany and met her love there. She describes the mixed Russian-German language[1] of a Russian German girl from Central Asia who chooses a Turkish man as her partner. She also depicts life trajectories of two Russophone students from different post-Soviet states who experience cultural shock, use German concepts in their Russian, strive to adapt to the situation and deliberate over the dilemma: to stay in Germany or return home. One of them lives with an age-mate from Ukraine, the other, with an older German man implicated in criminal behavior. Remarkably, all the characters are to different degrees proficient in German, while Germans from the East of the country still speak some Russian.

A perspective of a western man married to a Russian woman is presented by a Norwegian professional who was working in Moscow (Sandermoen 2018) whose love story started in Moscow where he met his future wife. The reader clearly sees that the spouses had very different background, which explains their different worldviews. Many things in Moscow seem strange to the author. This is how he formulates his first impressions of Russian men and women: When visiting Russia, one immediately notices an abundance of elegantly dressed beautiful women, seemingly ready to party. They have slim figures largely unaffected by fast and ultraprocessed foods. By contrast Russian men seem to him looking sloppy. They are seldom brought up to pay attention to their health and grooming. Their views of family life, man and wife relations are reminiscent of some traditional Asian cultures and are quite different from what is acceptable and common among Europeans. Contrary to the widespread stereotype that Russian women are "fortune seekers," the author realizes that Russophone women want to have happy family life and offer warmth and passion once a close connection is established. They demonstrate devotion and love for old-fashioned gallantry in their relationships. Sandermoen believes that Russian women prioritize their appearances, dressing up even for a visit to the nearby store, which reflects a cultural emphasis on beauty and self-presentation. Like with any generalization, these descriptions lack subtlety, although the author did capture some of the trends.

Growing up in the Soviet Union, the author's wife faced additional challenges, because she was born in Tajikistan where her grandparents were exiled in Stalin's times, and she had a Georgian surname. As a result, she had to experience the society's chauvinistic and sometimes racist attitudes towards satellite republics. She recalls pleasant memories from her childhood in Dushanbe (the capital of Tadjikistan), but also the need to be vigilant against disrespectful behavior towards females, particularly young girls. In the West, access to social and health services became a universal right, exemplified by practices like child allowance payments. Conversely, in Russia, people rely more on interpersonal networks rather than state

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[1]Like ***Ist nicht dein Ernst!*** *Мне просто нужен* ***Geschenk zum Geburtstag meiner Mutter****, понимаешь?* ***Dringend!*** '**Are you serious?** I just need **a gift for my mother's birthday**, you know? **Urgently!**'. The speech of the older generation speaking German with a Russian accent, is presented in Cyrillic transliteration, while those who grew up in Germany, except for individual words, do not have an accent; they borrow more complex expressions from German, and these are given in Latin script. See also Meng, Protassova 2022.

services. Russian wives consult online communities before making decisions about healthcare, social insurance or legal issues rather than follow official channels. It is not customary to discuss intimate matters with neighbors, but it is acceptable to share them with strangers.

According to Sandermoen (ibid.), Russian mothers uphold a strict and traditional approach to parenting, emphasizing the importance of their children's neatness and obedience, and they are direct in addressing any shortcomings. This style is in stark contrast with a more lenient and praise-oriented Western parenting style that may inadvertently foster unrealistic expectations. Russian schools prioritize strict discipline, academic rigor, and early testing compared to their European counterparts, whereas Western European schools often prioritize joy, play, and teamwork, particularly in the lower grades.

In Sandermoen's view, Russian women constantly think that everyone is hungry and try to offer too much food; they consider the kitchen to be their territory. Russians more often have portraits of their writers on the walls than of their own relatives; they know classic music much better than the cinema and the Western fiction. When asked "How are you?" Russians take it seriously and give a detailed report about their life. They sit down and keep silent for a while before starting on a journey. They always tell jokes, love long toasts, birch trees and quote from old Soviet films. When visiting friends, they bring small gifts. They are convinced that it is boring to live anywhere outside Russia.

A frequent case of a mixed marriage is when a Russian woman marries a foreigner older than herself. It is often a second marriage for both, and they already have children. Mattisson's book (2024) begins with the heroine explaining how difficult it was for her to live in Russia with a Ukrainian surname.[2] Although she spent summers with her grandmother in Western Ukraine as a child, she did not learn the language, and her Ukrainian identity did not form. Marrying a Swede as her second husband, Mattisson changed her surname, but for her, the word *familiya* 'surname' itself began to be etymologized as 'family.' Her second husband was an abuser. Two more children were born. The author feels she is in limbo: neither Swedish nor Russian. In the beginning, she could not follow traditions because the Swedes she had met would not share them. A foreign country, unfamiliar language, and severe climate—all of these caused rejection. She observes that lacking knowledge about the simplest things that were done automatically at home makes you feel stupid. You cannot make use of your previous experience and skills and it is next to impossible to achieve a respectable status in the new country, although you were "someone to respect" back home.

Children experience changes more acutely and more emotionally. Vulnerability experienced by their parents in the first stages of immigration makes them feel unprotected. But they have an important advantage: they usually learn a new language faster. Today, few migrants start their journey to a new country without

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[2]The surname was just strange (Muzyka 'music'), it could not be associated with Ukraine, and Ukraine was their own, friendly country. In Russia, millions of people live with Ukrainian surnames that do not raise suspicions, including people in the Russian government. We can also give an example when in Finland a girl was teased because of her supposedly Russian surname, while in fact it was Polish-Ukrainian. See also Protassova, Yelenevskaya 2024a.

learning some English. Before 2014, Mattison was not inhibited to talk about her origin, and everyone laughed at the thought that Russia could invade a neighboring country. No more. In Sweden, it was completely normal to communicate with a new family of the spouse whom you divorced. Mattison embraced the idea of going to university at the age of almost 30. Today the author is proud to speak Swedish fluently with but a slight accent. She understands almost everything, and if she doesn't, she memorizes unfamiliar words in context. She feels it was important for her to move from one place to another because gradually you learn to adapt to different ways of life in your surroundings, to find the right man, to resist manipulation, and to reestablish yourself in your profession. Although the Russian language might hurt today, the Russian classic literature remains her anchor, says the author.

New experiences, events and encounters affect development of one's identity, and migration and building up family life under new conditions makes this process deeper and more dramatic. The questions "Who am I? Who do I identify with? In what spirit shall I bring up my children? Should I make a goal to bring them up in such a way that they would wish to maintain my native language and culture, or will it be easier for them to live if they completely assimilate and become indistinguishable from their peers in the host country? In various internet discussion forums created by and for women, and uniting Russian speakers coming from various communities and linguistic surroundings these questions emerge again and again, triggering heated discussions. We came across numerous reflective posts that reveal immigrants' search for an answer to the question of who and what they identify with. On the website *eva.ru* one of discussants writes about her self-perception:

> **EV:** And if you're curious about who I am in terms of nationality, I'd be delighted to tell you. I was born in the Soviet Union, I was a Ukrainian citizen until recently, and I've been a US citizen for approximately a year. According to the nationality entry in my ancestors' passports, I am approximately half Russian, a quarter Jewish, and a quarter German. So, who do you think I feel I am?

The author of the post seems to be at peace with different components of her background. She is neither proud nor ashamed of any of them, taking hybridity as a natural part of her life and identity.

Attempts to facilitate the assimilation of 'imported' wives through the establishment of organizations for them, driving lessons, group outings and trips are particularly interesting. Clubs for older immigrants might be formed to organize activities such as tourist trips (including overseas), camping vacations, reading groups, and choirs. Theater and journalistic studios, photo clubs, fashion design, and camps are available for younger people. To breed some unity of the Russian speakers in the young generation, parents organize language and art courses, send Christmas vs New Year cards, arrange meetings around the globe, exhibitions of children's art, festivals of the amateur theaters and other cultural events.

The process of merging two cultures and traditions in the family sometimes leads to conflicts and requires a lot of open-mindedness, tolerance and readiness to find compromise. Intermarried couples sometimes face discrimination and misunderstanding by people in their environment, adding an extra layer of difficulty to their journey.

Regardless of these challenges, many intermarried couples find that the difficulties they have to overcome bring them closer together and help them to appreciate and respect their partner's cultural heritage. They often find that the journey of intermarriage leads to personal growth and a deeper understanding of the world and each other.

Friendships

Researchers have shown that female immigrants need social networks outside their workplace more than men. Women tend to be more active in maintaining contacts with fellow immigrants and making new acquaintances both with co-ethnics and members of the majority in their host countries (Remennick 2005, 2007, Ryabov 2013, 2016). The trouble is that host countries' majorities only partially meet the women's need for support in a new environment. The newcomers carefully probe their environment to find a way to better life for themselves and their families and seek to find spiritual 'sisters'. Those who are used to being socially active form NGOs, but most prefer informal contacts by participating in community organizations and events, such as clubs, hobby groups, festivals, charity organizations, weight-watching groups and others. This enables women to spend their leisure hours meaningfully and break the monotony of their daily routine. Some of these activities, such as concerts, hikes and excursions are organized for families, but others are for women only, enabling them to socialize outside the family milieu (cf. Intke-Hernández, Holm 2015). The desire to share experiences and problems and receive advice from the likeminded is also manifested in numerous online groups for Russian-speaking women, such as Facebook groups "Girls in Belgium", "Russian-speaking mothers in Germany, Russian-speaking mothers in Israel", "Russian girls in Valencia", "Russian girls in Turkey" and others (Yelenevskaya 2024).

Female groups are among the most popular communities uniting Russian-speaking diasporans. Members of these communities do not always meet in person, and their communication is primarily virtual. Sometimes they bring together women residing in one country, but more often they are transnational. The women discover that their worldview, everyday practices, and child rearing methods are markedly different from those of women in their host societies; at the same time, they find that their reasons for migration, problems they encounter in integration and patterns of cultural adaptation are quite similar, irrespective of which country in the post-Soviet space they come from. Russian is the lingua franca of their communication; they speak the same language, literally and metaphorically. Before the pandemic it was not uncommon to organize offline meetings and conferences consolidating their new global friendships. These contacts are the pillars of the diasporans' transnational identity, which has supplanted the previous Soviet supranational identity (Protassova 2012). The worldwide virtual community of Russian speakers is thriving even today despite the new dividing line: those who support Russian invasion in Ukraine and those who are against it.

Many Russophone families continue celebrating the International Women's Day but do not ignore Mothers' and Fathers' days. These celebrations sometimes

turn into acts demonstrating determination to preserve one's identity. Thus, in the study conducted by Wara and Munkejord in Norway (2022), Russian-speaking women narrated that on the 8th of March they put on their best clothes and high-heeled shoes. They make up thoroughly using bright lipstick and go out. They use this holiday as an occasion to both confirm their identity and resist what they conceive as the majority's prejudiced perceptions of them as a group ('Russian women in Norway'). This is an opportunity for them to express femininity as they see it and which they feel they have to downplay on other days to avoid criticism of the local communities. This is also a revolt against the understanding of equality as sameness, which they feel dominates in Norwegian society.

Similar stories appear in the interview with our Israeli participant **S**. A university lecturer, she told us that she shocked her colleagues by wearing heels to classes and specially chosen clothes to the exams. She felt it was her way to express respectful attitude to the event and cited a popular Soviet phrase: *На работу как на праздник* 'Going to work like to a festivity'.

EP, who arrived in Norway from Vologda, talks about the Russian-speaking life in Tromsø and Bergen: they organize celebrations for the Old New Year (13th of January, the New Year in the Julian calendar), International Women's Day (March 8), *Maslenitsa* (Pancake week), Cosmonautics Day (April 12, commemorating the first manned flight to outer space by Yuri Gagarin), Victory Day, they arrange various quizzes and more. During their get-togethers they serve delicious food, sing folk and popular songs. Such events allow Norwegian and foreign husbands to become acquainted with Russian culture. Some women have lived in Norway for a long time, and for them maintenance of Russian cultural traditions is an important part of life. When the town is small, people are more interested and united; however, being part of Norwegian society is more important, remarks our interviewee.

A Poet and an expert in the Slavic studies at the University of Berkeley, Polina Barskova, describes herself in her pedagogical and research activities as a "laborer of literature", a somewhat unromantic stance. Having left her beloved city of St. Petersburg due to a personal tragedy, she views her emigration as one of the best things that happened in her life (besides the birth of her daughter). It offered her complexity, experience, and freedom, although she still longs for her hometown. Despite being far from her people, she believes in the importance of nurturing various loves and connections, finding significance in the ability to contribute to culture in her new environment. If necessary, she rereads Alexander Herzen, Russian exiled writer of the 19th century. However, she believes that people are given different loves, different respects, different friendships, different relationships, and what she feels towards Berlin, San Francisco, New York are also important parts of herself (Gordeeva 2023).

The latest wave of migration gives examples of friendships evolving into professional partnerships. A case in point is career trajectories of Miriam Sekhon and Liza Miller (Leyfer 2024) The two women have known each other since early childhood. Born and brought up in Moscow, they pursued successful careers, one as a theater and movie actress, the other as a classic musician playing a multitude of instruments. After working in Russia and traveling the world, both settled in Montreal where they formed a duet. They are fluent in French and English and

their songs are in three languages, attracting Russophone immigrants and Canadians. At the end of the interview, also conducted in three languages after the box-office success of their concerts, they said that it was an amazing gift to find each other in the same city again. Transforming a lifelong friendship into professional relations opens new horizons. They feel that everything is possible, because whatever disputes arise in the process of creating new shows, they are still close friends ready for give and take.

Many Russian-speaking immigrant women find strength and resilience through their communities and find a sense of belonging and purpose in their new home. Their experience as immigrants is unique, and it also testifies that the human spirit is powerful, demonstrating the ability to persevere through adversity. Russophone women often play the lead role in maintaining family life and integrating into a new society while serving as nurturers and supporters of their families. They also feel responsible for creating a sense of comfort and community (cf. Protassova, Yelenevskaya 2024b).

Immigrant Women as Anchors of the Family Life

In Europe, there is no statistically significant variation in family size or child count between intermarried and endogamous couples. In the US, mixed-nationality couples have greater labor-force participation rates but substantially lower formal marriage rates, whereas higher Gender Inequality Index values were positively connected with the propensity to work for money and work longer hours, implying self-selection in the US immigration system. Children of working Russian-speaking immigrant mothers who are also more involved in their children's school affairs, get superior academic results (Ponomareva 2017).

Family communication and child-directed speech vary from family to family (Koptjevskaja Tamm 2000, Goleva 2012, Vorobeva 2024). A family language is inevitably the one that is used in larger communities, because idiolects are smaller in volume than sociolects. A child growing up in a single family cannot have the same vocabulary as a child growing up, figuratively speaking, communicating with an entire village. Sociolinguistic studies of bilingual families' linguistic practices address the contexts, procedures, and outcomes of private communication between spouses from various national and cultural groups.

There are also issues with the adoption of Russian-speaking children (cf. Schwartz, Kaslow 2003). Fogle (2012) investigates how Russian-speaking adoptees in three US households actively influence chances for language acquisition and identity building through everyday communication. She also studies how these children acquire proficiency in the language of their new environment and socialize in it while still maintaining Russian. In the framework of the family language policy theory Fogle and Curdt-Christiansen (2013) demonstrate that when adoptive parents of the older native Russian-speaking adoptees made decisions based on their children's specific cognitive and emotional abilities, educational requirements, and desire to build a family, such strategy proves beneficial for the adoptees and contributes to their successful integration into society.

Mattisson (2024: 101) explains that one of the reasons for divorcing her Swedish husband was that, although she had adapted to his language and culture, he had not learned her language and culture. He disliked her speaking Russian with their children and her relatives, referring to the language as strange, despite her efforts to translate everything or switch to English in the presence of others. If the wife in a mixed family has a good command of the dominant language of the environment, it does not contribute to her husband's motivation to study Russian.

Yet, some Russian schools in the diaspora are already offering Russian language classes to parents who do not speak Russian. According to the one-parent-one-language principle, children are addressed in the native language of the parent. However, unless this principle has been consciously chosen, and the adults are disciplined in adhering to it, most families find it difficult to communicate at home without code mixing and translanguaging. Today, translanguaging is becoming more acceptable in language pedagogies, and school policies concerning bilingual children are becoming more tolerant and more flexible. Sometimes, different strategies are tried with different children in the same family. Language and culture appear to be of vital relevance in intermarriage in terms of establishing a new identity and deeper understanding of each other. Personal experience, society and the marital partner influence the Russian-speaking immigrants' decisions. In most situations, the easiest solution with the least amount of effort is chosen.

For **RU**, living in Oslo and coming from an international family, a crucial part of supporting the Russian language for her children is visits from her mother who meets the children after school and entertains them during their free time. An important aspect of **RU**'s life is socializing with expatriates and other international families. Generation roles have changed in modern societies as the elderly remain socially active much longer than in the past. This also concerns diasporic grandparents who see their peers in western societies continuing to travel, take courses and do sports. Turning into a free babysitter for the family is no longer perceived as a standard practice. But the role grandparents do take upon themselves willingly is transferring the language and culture of the home-country to the young. This role is not always rewarding, because both children and their parents may show resistance to Russian language maintenance, which seems to them to be a wasted effort.

MT, who has been living in Sweden for a long time, does not find it possible to be involved in Russian-speaking organizations, while speaking Russian in the family is perfectly natural for her. While conversing with her child in Russian at a café, she encountered situations where Swedes would give her odd looks, and she had to explain in sophisticated Swedish that multilingualism is an asset, not a deficiency.

Those who used to live in a monolingual environment find it difficult to acquire the language/s of the majority at the same time improving their proficiency in English, which is becoming a prerequisite for employment in many spheres (Iikkanen 2020). It is not always easy to overcome generation gaps, and Russian-speaking parents eager for their bi- and multilingual children to share their values and interests resort to various ways of transferring their culture to their offspring growing up away from Russia (Karpava et al. 2024). At the same time, it often happens that immigrants of the one-and-a-half and second generation are so deeply immersed in the culture of the host society that even when they marry within the community, they switch over to the

majority language in their home communication, and their parents who have not learned it well, feel that they are losing ties with their children and grandchildren (Tiaynen-Qadir, Matyska 2020; Yelenevskaya 2023).

Social stigmatization affects family relations. Since most children acquire a new language faster than adults, in the initial period following resettlement, parents often resort to their children's help hoping to use them as interpreters and translators. However, this strategy is seldom successful, because even those adolescents whose proficiency in the language/s of the host country is high are not taught skills needed for translation, nor are they familiar with the terminology of business documents, legal services and medicine—those very domains which are essential for immigrants to understand. As a result, these failed attempts lead to frustration on both sides. Moreover, parents are humiliated by having to depend on their children, and the children lose the feeling of security since they see their parents lose self-confidence (Intke-Hernández, Holm 2015).

To combat the decline of Russian culture, migrants must dissociate the language and culture from the current regime and state, says Maria Stepanova, who now lives in Germany. Says she, "No one from the outside will be able to impose any norms, rules of behavior, or preserve it in a crystal coffin. I believe that 'preserving the Russian language' can only amount to finally giving it freedom. Let our language live wherever it wants, let it blend with other dialects. Let it whistle, chatter, produce neologisms – anglicize, germanize, arabize." With the language already detached from a specific territory due to a new wave of emigration, it should acquire new traits, allowing it to roam freely and blend with other dialects, ensuring its vitality and adaptability (Arkhangelsky 2023).

New Employment Opportunities

In the Soviet Union most women had jobs and in addition carried the biggest load of household duties. Having immigrated to the West, Russophone women integrated into the culture in which men are still considered to be the main breadwinners but are also expected to be much more involved in doing domestic chores and in child rearing. In Central Asian countries due to the reinvigoration of the Muslim culture, women feel they are losing some achievements of emancipation they enjoyed in Soviet times, and migrating they hope to regain them. However, Russian-speaking women in many countries have difficulties finding jobs according to their educational level since skills and degrees obtained in the post-Soviet states are not recognized and undervalued (Elo et al. 2020). So, these women face the dilemma of additional studies or retraining which often interferes with child rearing; otherwise, they must reconcile with unqualified jobs. Since work is a central aspect of their identities and a source of their feelings of self-worth, this professional devaluation feeds personal distress and de-emancipation (Bloch 2011, Şahin 2023).

For some female entrepreneurs, starting a business abroad can be a path to financial independence, offering an opportunity to escape limiting gender roles and restrictions in their home countries. In many cases, these entrepreneurs bring with them a wealth of knowledge and experience, which they use to create successful

businesses and even establish themselves as leaders in their industries. On the other hand, the path to success as a female entrepreneur abroad can also be fraught with challenges, including linguistic deficits, cultural discrepancies, and limited access to resources and networks. In many cases, female entrepreneurs face additional obstacles related to gender, such as discriminatory laws and regulations, and cultural norms that limit their opportunities, access to investments and capital.

The artist **KL** has lived in France since the beginning of 1992. She owns a small house and prioritizes her well-organized comfort above all else. This is more important for her than the country in terms of politics, language, nature, or culture, although those factors are also significant. She feels at home in France thanks to her country cottage with a garden and a studio. She brought with her clothes, photo albums, books, and Orthodox icons that are dear to her heart. Her first husband, a Russian, emigrated in 1978 and created a distinctly Russian home in Paris, speaking poor French. **KL** helped him on all occasions. She still owns his four antique samovars and continues to acquire old and valuable Russian items. **KL** was a devoted wife, and her life revolved around her husband, but he passed away in 2010. Later she remarried a Pole, and now they are blending all cultures accessible to them.

NP who heads an institution employing several thousand people in Germany is still married to the same Russian husband with whom she migrated. She demonstrates remarkable resilience and determination, working tirelessly to build successful businesses and establish her place in the economic landscape of the world. Through her entrepreneurial spirit and hard work, she became a role model and inspiring figure for other women and girls, breaking down barriers and paving the way for greater equality and opportunity. Despite the challenges she faces, she was able to achieve remarkable success and make lasting contributions to her community.

A lawyer **PI**, had three children when she met a Norwegian in St. Petersburg, married him and moved to Norway in 1995. At that time, there were few Russian-speaking immigrants in the country. Some were descendents of the refugees who escaped October Revolution and the Civil War that followed. Only one ship arrived in 1920 from Arkhangelsk, and just a few Russian speakers remained in the country. They endeavored to maintain Russian in their families, hoping to return to Russia. Their descendants could visit this neighboring state, where the language was their native tongue, for the first time in the 1990s. According to **PI**, immigrants always establish similar organizations and organize events for children and themselves (clubs, celebrations of Russian religious holidays, schools, charity concerts, etc.), and they often vie for dominance within the community. **PI** founded her own music school, striving to keep fees as low as possible. Norwegians enjoy attending musical and themed evenings, and she is happy to provide such opportunities for them. Thanks to various events, it is possible to bring Norwegians closer to Russian culture. She also worked to organize concerts for Russian musicians, dancers, and singers.

IL, who has been living in Germany since 1992, recalls being amazed by the products sold in German stores and by what Germans discarded. She made efforts to send large parcels to Russia, not only food but also clothing and even plastic yogurt cups. Her home has been always full of guests, especially in the early years of her family's life in the West, with hundreds of migrant friends and acquaintances coming and going. Each person left with a large bag (which she

specifically kept for such occasions). **IL** learned accounting in Germany and founded her own firm, which provides services for Russian speakers.

XS, living in Italy, does not believe that there is a problem with socialization. For Italians, it is enough to go out to the square to start chatting. By becoming a guide, she helps Russian speakers get acquainted with Italian culture.

AK, who became a kindergarten teacher in Finland (living there since 1989), has grown accustomed to working in diverse teams and believes that nationality and language are irrelevant to her. What matters is a personality, whether s/he is easy to communicate and collaborate with. **AK** prefers mixed international teams to nationally homogeneous ones.

CC from Finland is involved in the global union of Russophone theaters abroad. This amateur movement receives subsidies from the government, often goes on tours, and helps Ukrainian refugees. Her education as a Russian language teacher and theatrical producer allows her to work with groups of different ages and carry out unconventional projects.

AL from Novosibirsk started working at school while she was a student, teaching French and English. Then she moved on to work at a large company and was heavily involved in training and teaching adults. Later, she went on a volunteer project to India to set up a computer class for children in a boarding school. She married a Frenchman with whom she lived in Strasbourg, France, in the USA, and now in the UK. She studied the theory of Russian language teaching, learned through practice, created teaching materials, and works both off- and online.

Polina Zherebtsova is a writer, documentarian, prose writer, and poet, best known for her *Chechen Diaries*. Since 2013, Polina and her husband have been living in Finland, where they were granted political asylum after facing persecution in Russia from both Russians and Chechens for her publications about the war in Chechnya. In her interview she says that the war in Chechnya made her leave home, although she never took sides, only supported peaceful civilians. Initially hopeful for peace, she faced escalating hostility and even genocide. Coming from a multiethnic family, she witnessed crimes committed by both sides. In Russia's peaceful regions, she felt out of place due to cultural differences and a lack of state support. Though she and her mother met kind people, survival was a struggle, and after the war, they were left homeless and unsupported, lacking documents. In 2017, Zherebtsova became a Finnish citizen and received the Ernest Hemingway Award, established to support Russian-speaking authors whose works demonstrate a quest for new artistic forms and the expansion of linguistic and semantic boundaries (Shalygina 2018).

According to Soldatov and Borogan (2019), in the 30-million Russian diaspora, seeking connections with ordinary people rather than the highbrow intelligentsia revealed the vulnerability of being an immigrant, despite potential financial gains and social upward mobility, with few opting for employment at Google and other hi-tech companies, where assimilation into a diverse workforce often leads to a new identity. However, many still experience "Russian longing" and nostalgia, sometimes leading to an unexpected affinity with Putin (Medvedev 2021). A Russophone woman told members of an online discussion forum about psychological barriers she faced since her profession was not in demand in her host country. Having small children, she could not dedicate herself to re-establishing her career. At some point she divorced her husband

and changed her name to a Finnish one, after which, she started receiving more job interview invitations. Despite defending a doctoral dissertation at the University of Helsinki, another forum participant encountered challenges in working as a psychologist in Finland due to high language requirements and bureaucratic procedures, although she planned to help expats in English and Russian only. In Russia, recent changes in childcare emphasize rejecting gender stereotypes simultaneously with the idea of staying at home with a child, summarizes the third communicant. In Finland, they should include measures for integrating foreign mothers and recognize the diversity of immigrant family roles and lifestyles (Shalygina 2021).

Conclusion

The experiences of Russian-speaking female immigrants abroad are shaped by language dynamics, family interactions, and social practices, influencing their communication patterns, integration, and cultural identity. They often act as cultural bridges between their new and old home countries, promoting understanding and facilitating cultural exchange. Despite challenges like language barriers and socio-economic downward mobility typical during the first stages of immigrant life, Russophone immigrant women contribute to their communities through entrepreneurship and education initiatives. Researchers investigating Russophone diasporic communities note that despite differences in age, level of education, cultural environment in their host countries, Russophone immigrants, including women demonstrate similarity of integration patterns caused by similarity of their linguo-cultural background[מם1].

Russian female immigrant writers have made significant contributions to literature by sharing their experiences and perspectives of living in a foreign country. Their works often explore themes such as identity, belonging, and cultural displacement, as well as the challenges of adapting to a new society. These writers have provided unique and valuable perspectives on the immigrant experience, enriching the literary landscape and fostering greater understanding and empathy among readers.

Language dynamics play a significant role in the social integration of Russophone female emigrants in their host countries. The Russian language serves as a crucial tool for communication within their families, often maintained as the primary language, fostering a sense of cultural continuity and connection to their roots. However, outside familial circles, these emigrants must cope with linguistic and cultural differences, often adapting their communication patterns to fit into their new environment. This balancing act between preserving their cultural identity within their families and adapting to the norms of their host country reflects the multifaceted roles that Russian-speaking female emigrants assume. Their experiences highlight the complexities of identity, belonging, and adaptation in cross-cultural settings, as they formulate their multiple identities and affiliations while striving to maintain a sense of cultural heritage amidst the challenges of their new environment.

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Population Composition of Five Subgroups of Koch Populations of Meghalaya, India: An Anthropodemographic Study

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Anthropodemography uses anthropological methods to provide a better understanding of demographic phenomena. It refers to micro demography incorporating a fieldwork element. This study examines population composition of five subgroups (Chapra, Sanga, Satpari, Tintikiya and Wanang) of the Koch tribe of Meghalaya, India. According to Sundbarg's classification of population, Chapra population is of regressive type, Sanga, Satpari and Tintikiya are of stationary type. On the other hand, Wanang population is of progressive type. Overall sex ratio is more or less 1:1 among the Wanang, which is in favour of males in the case of Chapra. Among the Sanga, Satpari and Tintikiya, the sex ratio is low. Mean live births and surviving children both are found to be lowest among the Chapra and highest among the Tintikiya. On the basis of marriage pattern all the subgroups of Koch population are highly endogamous. Infant, child and juvenile mortality rates in the populations covered under the present study are fairly high. Side by side, the admixture rate, calculated according to Lasker (1952), is very high in all the subgroups of the present study. Coefficient of breeding isolation suggests that differentiation in allele frequency due to genetic drift is not so important in all the subgroups, excepting Satpari population. Opportunity for selection is very high among the Chapra, which is in moderate intensity in the Sanga and Satpari. On the other hand, it is mild among the Tintikiya and Wanang.

Keywords: *microdemography, sub-populations, reproductive performance, opportunity for selection*

Introduction

The study of population composition is considered by demographers to be the most fundamental and pertinent area of research. The internal organisation of a human population in relation to one or more demographic characteristics at a specific moment in time is known as the population composition. In population literature, "composition" is frequently used interchangeably with "distribution" or "structure" (Misra 1982).

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In actuality, the goal of anthropological demography is to gather specific population- level data for demographic studies (Rakshit 1976). This area of demography focuses on improving our understanding of demographic phenomena in both the present and historical populations by applying anthropological theory and methodology. Demographers employ proximal determinants to study and comprehend the positions of birth and death, while anthropologists use analytical notions like kinship, identification, and personhood. The human population is the common research object of both anthropology and demography. Demography, on the other hand, is more positivistic and focusses on a qualitative description of the institutional and behavioural factors that define these processes (Bernardi and Hutter 2007).

Population processes and sociocultural norms impact both large and small organisational levels. Demographers have found huge changes and complex patterns of variation that make it hard for anthropologists to closely look at the practices that are involved in important events and figure out how these local practices are connected to those that happen at the national and international levels. The various domains of meaning and practice that anthropologists describe challenge demographers to consider the cultural backgrounds of population processes. This often aims to gather data at the population level for demographic studies. Thus, we refer to micro demography with a fieldwork component as anthropological demography.

India, with numerous social, ethnic, linguistic, religious, and territorial groups, provides ample opportunities for anthropologists to examine mating patterns, kinship, reproductive behaviour, and identify issues related to the birth and death of populations (Adak et al. 2012). The study of a population composition acts as an indicator of its current population dynamics (Chachra and Bhasin 1998). Population composition has been studied widely in some areas in some populations in India (Basu 1969, Ghosh 1976, Talukdar 1979, Rao 1989, Narhari 1991, Reddy 1991, Panda and Satpati 1996, Bharali et al. 2022, and others). The Koch population of Meghalaya State of India seems to be interesting in this respect that are divided into several endogamous groups. This study examines the population dynamics of five Koch subgroups residing in Meghalaya.

Materials and Methods

The present study was carried out in five villages of West Garo Hills district, Meghalaya. This district is situated in the North-western part of Meghalaya (Figure 1).

Figure 1. *Study Area (not to scale)*

North-East India   Meghalaya

West Garo Hills
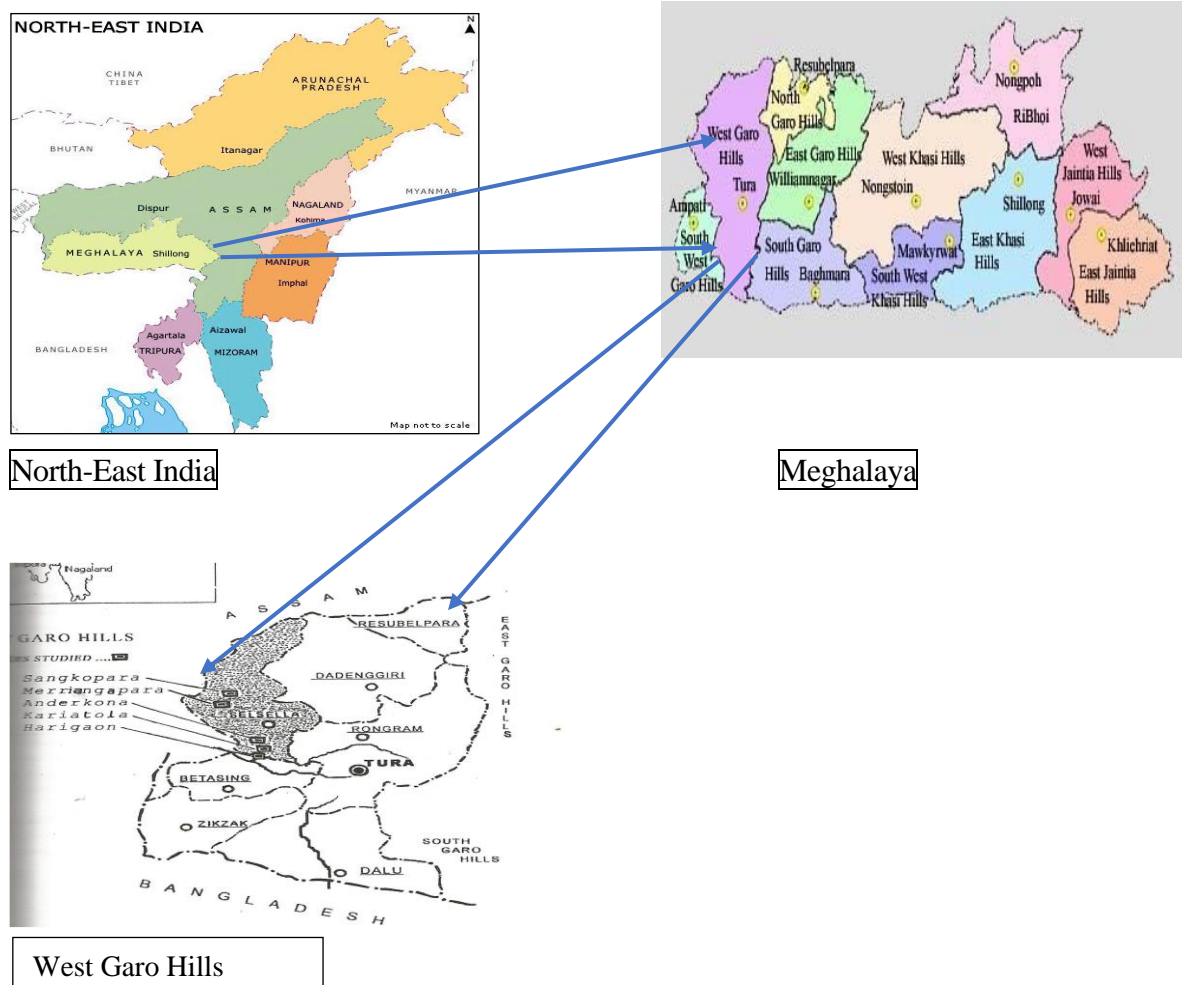
In view of operational feasibility, demographic data were collected from five Koch subgroups namely, the Chapra, Sanga, Satpari, Tintikiya and Wanang, instead of seven. To do so, five villages are selected for these five subgroups, where these populations are numerically dominant. The villages selected for the present study are Anderkona for the Chapra, Harigaon for the Sanga, Kariatola for the Satpari, Sangkopara for the Tintikiya and Marriangapara for the Wanang. To collect necessary data all the Koch households were surveyed in the respective villages for respective populations, therefore, no specific sampling technique was followed in this study.

The Koch

Scholars are of different opinions regarding ethnic affinity of the Koch. Some scholars hold that they are the Dravidians (Dalton 1872), while others are of the opinion that they belong to Mongoloid origin (Haddon 1924, Das 1962, Sengupta 1982). For the Koch of Garo Hills, Meghalaya, there are two stories regarding their original homeland. Some sections believe that their original home was in

Arebela range of the central part of Garo Hills. Another legend says that Koch of Garo hills were migrated from Assam state.

Besides, Assam and Meghalaya, the Kochs are also found in Manipur, Tripura and North Bengal in India and Chittagong and Noakhali districts in Bangladesh. In Meghalaya, they are mainly distributed in western and south-western parts of West Garo hills district. Agriculture is the mainstay of the people and land is owned individually and monogamy is the general practice of marriage among them. They speak a language, belongs to the Tibeto-Burman origin (Gait 1905). Government of Meghalaya accorded Scheduled Tribe status to the Koch People. Khe Koch of Garo hills follow the matrilineal system of society. Their religion is a blend of tribal and Hindu religion. Each subgroup consists of several exogamous clans known as *nikiny*. They are believed to be one of the oldest inhabitants of Garo Hills.

For the present study a door-to-door survey was conducted. The households were selected without any specific sampling technique, but care was taken that each of them contained at least one ever married individual. Data were collected through in-depth interview with each of the married woman or head of the household, using household and fertility schedules, taking into consideration those demographic data as suggested by the World Health Organization (WHO 1964, 1968), which are as follows:

Individual Records: Individual records include information on name, age, sex, marital status, occupation, religion, community affiliation, place of birth, place of residence, clan, tribe, etc., were collected through structured household schedule.

The Reproductive History: Information on reproductive performance of each married woman was collected through fertility schedule and pedigree. Special attention was given to collect data on age at marriage, age at first child birth, number of pregnancies, number of live births, number of abortions (spontaneous and induced abortion), still-birth, birth order, age, sex and marital status of each offspring, if died – age at death, etc.

Age: Age of each member of the household was recorded. But in the present work we faced certain difficulty in collecting data on age of individuals especially those elderly individuals because they were not aware of their real age. Consequently, we had to estimate the age of individuals in certain cases with reference to some important local events.

Ethical consideration: This study is a part of Ph. D. study conducted by MK (Murali Kotal), who collected the data. North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya, India approved this study. Apart from this each informant were described the purpose of this study. Respective data were collected after they consented.

Limitation of the study: This study is based on five subgroups of Koch population, instead of seven. Two subgroups of the Koch namely the Banai and Shankar were not taken into consideration in this study as they are relatively sparsely distributed in different villages of West Garo Hills District, Meghalaya.

Results

Age and Sex Structure

According to Sundbarg's classification of population, Table 1 shows that the Chapra population tends to be *regressive* in which the base of the population pyramid constricted (Figure 2) indicating the low fertility rates in the population. On the other hand, the Sanga, Satpari and Tintikiya populations are of *stationary types* of population (Figure 2), which are by and large an indication of low fertility rates that may be due to either adoption of family planning methods or high infant and child mortality rates. On the other hand, the Wanang population approaches to be of *progressive type*, which is characterized by high fertility rates. The population pyramid (Figure 2) shows that the base is broad, although it tends to be constricted in the case of females, i.e., it indicates to a certain extent that infant and child mortality rates are higher in females than in males among the Wanang.

Table 1 also shows that the overall sex ratio (i.e., the number of males per 100 females) is more or less according to the ideal sex ratio of 1:1 among the Wanang (101.02) and it is in favour of males in the case of Chapra (106.67), though it is not significant (χ^2 =0.32, df=1, P>0.05). Among the Sanga (81.65), Satpari (96.75) and Tintikiya (93.84), the sex ratio is low, especially in the former. However, the Chi-square values indicate the sex ratios do not deviate significantly from the ideal sex ratio of 1:1 in all the three populations, namely the Sanga (χ^2 =2.93, df=1, P>0.05), Satpari (χ^2 =0.07, df=1, P>0.05) and Tintikiya (χ^2 =0.41, df=1, P>0.05). Also, the differences in sex ratio between populations are found to be statistically insignificant (χ^2 =3.04, df=4, P>0.05). In comparison with the sex ratio among the War Khasi (109) of Meghalaya (Khongsdier and Ghosh 1994), the overall sex ratio is lower in each of these Koch subgroups. In fact, it indicates that male mortality is higher than female mortality in the Sanga (81.65), Satpari (96.75) and Tintikiya (93.84).

In the age group 0-14 years, the sex ratio is high among the Chapra (108.33), but it is lower in the Wanang (97.47), Tintikiya (90.28), Satpari (92.50) and Sanga (66.07), although the Chi-square values indicate that the deviation from the ideal sex ratio of 1:1 is not statistically significant for all populations (P>0.05), except for the Sanga where the sex ratio is significantly low (χ^2=3.88, df=1, P<0.05). It is also found that the differences in sex ratio between populations are not statistically significant (χ^2 =3.05, df= 4, P>0.05). In the middle age group 15-49 years, the sex ratio among the Wanang (101) and Chapra (103) is more or less according to the ideal sex ratio, but it is again lower in the Sanga (89), Satpari (95) and Tintikiya (94), although it is not significant (P>0.05).

Table 1. *Total Population of the Five Koch Subgroups by Age and Sex*

Age group (years)	Chapra Male	Chapra Female	Sanga Male	Sanga Female	Satpari Male	Satpari Female	Tintikiya Male	Tintikiya Female	Wanang Male	Wanang Female
0-4	11	14	7	17	11	16	26	25	22	29
5-9	11	12	15	20	18	13	25	26	31	29
10-14	17	10	15	19	8	11	14	21	24	21
0-14	75		93		77		137		156	
%	24.19		32.40		31.82		33.50		39.39	
SR	108.33		66.07		92.50		90.28		97.47	
χ^2	0.12		3.88*		0.12		0.36		0.03	
15-19	16	18	18	13	15	13	25	26	21	26
20-24	16	20	11	15	6	17	21	24	12	18
25-29	19	12	14	17	16	13	18	22	22	15
30-34	18	13	12	10	10	10	9	16	12	16
35-39	18	13	8	15	7	6	21	13	18	14
40-44	8	8	9	7	6	8	9	11	8	6
45-49	5	13	6	11	10	7	9	7	12	9
15-49	197		166		144		231		209	
%	63.55		57.84		59.50		56.48		52.78	
SR	103.09		88.64		94.59		94.12		100.96	
χ^2	0.05		0.60		0.11		0.12		0.01	
50-54	8	6	2	4	3	5	6	7	7	3
55-59	4	7	6	5	4	3	7	8	3	7
60+	9	4	6	5	5	1	8	5	7	4
50+	38		28		21		41		31	
%	12.26		9.76		8.68		10.02		7.83	
SR	123.53		100.00		133.33		105.00		121.43	
χ^2	0.42		2.29		0.43		0.03		0.29	
Total	160	150	129	158	119	123	198	211	199	197
Persons	310		287		242		409		396	
%	100.00		100.00		100.00		100.00		100.00	
SR	106.67		81.65		96.75		93.84		101.02	
χ^2	0.32		2.93		0.07		0.41		0.01	

SR = Sex ratio

*= Significant at 5% level of probability

Figure 2. *Population Pyramid of the Five Subgroups*
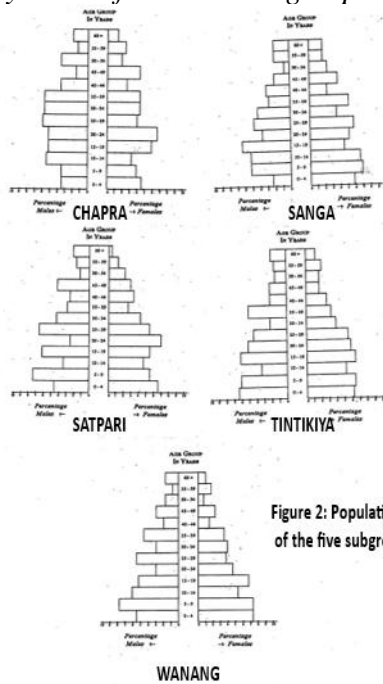
Figure 2: Population pyramid of the five subgroups

Population Characteristics

Some population characteristics among the five subgroups are shown in Table 2. It reveals a relatively lower index of aging, ranges between 7.05 (Wanang) and 17.33 (Chapra). This might be due to higher rate of mortality among the aged among them. Much variation is noticed in case of young dependency ratio in these populations. Lowest value of which is noticed among the Chapra (33.78) and highest is noticed among the Wanang (68.12). Child women ratio is also considerably lower among them, which ranges between 13.97 (Chapra) and 27.13 (Wanang) suggest a declining trend of fertility. Thus, young dependency ratio and child women ratio both are highest among the Wanang and lowest among the Chapra.

Table 2. *Some Population Indices Among Five Subgroups of the Koch*

Indices	Chapra	Sanga	Satpari	Tintikiya	Wanang
Index of aging	17.33	11.83	7.79	9.49	7.05
Young dependency ratio	33.78	50.82	48.43	52.89	68.12
Old dependency ratio	5.85	6.01	3.77	5.02	4.80
Total dependency ratio	39.63	56.83	52.20	57.91	72.92
Child women ratio	13.97	16.11	21.26	14.42	27.13

Frequency of Never-pregnant Women

Table 3 shows the frequency of never-pregnant women at the time of survey in all the subgroups of the Koch population. It is seen that about 15.48%, 7.58%, 10.53%, 4.49% and 12.24% of the married women are never pregnant in the Chapra, Sanga, Satpari, Tintikiya and Wanang respectively. Although it shows that there are variations between subgroups, the chi-square value indicates that the differences are not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 5.74$, P>0.05).

Moreover, most of the never-pregnant women are in lower age groups, who may still have the chance to reproduce. The Table shows that among the Tintikiya and Wanang, there are no women who are never pregnant in the age group 44 years and above. But in the Chapra, Sanga and Satpari, the frequency of never-pregnant women in the age group 44 years and above is found to be 6.67%, 8.00% and 5.26%, respectively. Thus, from this point of view, it may be suggested that number of never-pregnant women is more in the Chapra, Sanga and Satpari when compared with Tintikiya and Wanang.

Table 3. *Ever-Pregnant and Never Pregnant Women by Age Groups*

Pregnancy Status	Age groups of married women				Total
	<24years	24-33 years	34-43 years	≥ 44 years	
Chapra					
Ever-pregnant	4	20	19	28	71
Never- pregnant	6	4	1	2	13
Total	10	24	20	30	84
% of neverpregnant	60.00	16.67	5.00	6.67	15.48
Sanga					
Ever-pregnant	6	14	18	23	61
Never- pregnant	0	2	1	2	5
Total	6	16	19	25	66
% of neverpregnant	0.00	12.50	5.26	8.00	7.58
Satpari					
Ever-pregnant	6	13	14	18	51
Never- pregnant	2	3	0	1	6
Total	8	16	14	19	57
% of neverpregnant	25.00	18.75	0.00	5.26	10.53
Tintikiya					
Ever-pregnant	9	24	22	30	85
Never- pregnant	1	1	2	0	4
Total	10	25	24	30	89
% of neverpregnant	10.00	4.00	8.33	0.00	4.49
Wanang					
Ever-pregnant	12	27	23	24	86
Never- pregnant	10	2	0	0	12
Total	22	29	23	24	98
% of neverpregnant	45.45	6.90	0.00	0.00	12.24

Mean Age at First Childbirth

The mean age at first childbirth is given in Table 4. Differences in mean age at first birth between the different divisions of Koch subgroups are found to be significant for both males (F=4.59, P< 0.05) and females (F=5.72, P< 0.05). Among males, the mean age at first child birth is highest In the Tintikiya (27.60± 0.61 years) followed by the Chapra (27.34± 0.57 years) and the Sanga (26.60± 0.50 years), whereas the Satpari (25.37± 0.69 years) and Wanang males (25.03± 0.43 years) are more or less similar in mean age at first child birth. Both Satpari and Wanang males differ significantly from the other subgroups except the Sanga and Satpari (t=1.46, P> 0.05).

In the case of females, the ANOVA indicates that there are significant differences between the Koch subgroups in mean age at first child birth (F=5.72, P < 0.05). The mean age at first child birth is highest in the Satpari (21.02± 0.41 years) followed by the Chapra (20.08± 0.40 years) and Tintikiya (19.40± 0.42 years). The Satpari and Wanang females are found to be more or less similar in mean age at first childbirth.

Table 4. *Mean Age at First Child Birth (Years)*

Population	Male			Female		
	Number	Mean	SE	Number	Mean	SE
Chapra	56	27.34	0.57	71	20.08	0.40
Sanga	47	26.60	0.50	62	21.02	0.41
Satpari	43	25.37	0.69	50	18.70	0.50
Tintikiya	65	27.60	0.61	85	19.40	0.42
Wanang	72	25.03	0.43	85	18.68	0.34
F-ratio	4.59, P< 0.05			5.72, P< 0.05		

Fertility

The mean number of live births and surviving children to all married women increases with the rise in age group of the mothers for all populations. Table 5 shows that the mean number of live births per married women varies from 3.30±0.28 in the Chapra to 4.24±0.29 in the Tintikiya. The mean number of surviving children is also found to be lowest among the Chapra (2.32± 0.21) and highest among the Tintikiya (3.39±0.25). The ANOVA test indicates that the differences are statistically significant for both the live births (F=3.11, P<0.05) and surviving children (F=2.59, P<0.05). In comparison with other populations of Assam and Meghalaya, the mean number of live births per married women of all ages in each of these Koch subgroups is lower than that among the Pnars (6.04) of Jaintia hills (Khongsdier 1992), Christain (4.81) and Non Christain (4.66) War Khasis (Khongsdier 2001), Dalus (5.83) of West Garo hills (Patra and Kapoor, 1996), Hajongs (4.94) of West Garo hills (Barua, 1983), Brahmins (4.86), Kalitas (5.11), Kaibartas (4.39) and Ahoms (4.47) of Assam (Das and Das 1992).

Table 5. *Live Births and Surviving Children by Age Groups of All Married Mothers*

Population	≤24yrs	25-29 yrs	30-34yrs	35-39 yrs	40-44 yrs	≥ 45 yrs	Total
Chapra							
No. mothers	12	11	11	13	9	28	84
Live births	11	23	25	42	30	146	277
Mean± SE	0.92±0.30	2.09± 0.49	2.27±0.53	3.23±0.50	3.33±0.70	5.21±0.50	3.30±0.28
Surviving	9	14	20	24	23	105	195
Mean± SE	0.75±0.24	1.27±0.29	1.82±0.48	1.85±0.32	2.56±0.42	3.75±0.41	2.32±0.21
Sanga							
No. mothers	8	8	8	12	6	25	67
Live births	11	12	14	50	24	128	239
Mean± SE	1.38±0.30	1.50±0.35	1.75±0.23	4.17±0.68	4.00±1.33	5.12±0.48	3.57±0.32
Surviving	8	9	14	41	20	99	191
Mean± SE	1.00±0.25	1.13±0.21	1.75±0.23	3.42±0.72	3.33±1.07	3.96±0.39	2.85±0.27
Satpari							
No. mothers	9	9	9	6	6	18	57
Live births	8	18	34	33	31	88	212
Mean± SE	0.89±0.25	2.00±0.63	3.78±0.64	5.50±1.02	5.17±0.86	4.89±0.52	3.72±0.34
Surviving	7	17	26	26	24	63	163
Mean± SE	0.78±0.26	1.89±0.60	2.89±0.46	4.33±0.90	4.00±0.75	3.50±0.58	2.86±0.30
Tintikiya							
No. mothers	11	13	14	12	11	27	88
Live births	20	29	53	61	46	164	373
Mean± SE	1.82±0.40	2.23±0.39	3.79±0.59	5.08±0.57	4.81±0.76	6.07±0.50	4.24±0.29
Surviving	17	25	43	46	36	131	298
Mean± SE	1.55±0.32	1.92±0.30	3.07±0.47	3.83±0.48	3.27±0.78	4.85±0.50	3.39±0.25
Wanang							

No. mothers	24	14	15	15	6	23	97
Live births	22	45	57	93	37	137	391
Mean± SE	0.92±0.24	3.21±0.55	3.80±0.61	6.20±0.49	6.17±0.80	5.96±0.48	4.03±0.29
Surviving	15	37	47	62	34	100	295
Mean± SE	0.63±0.16	2.64±0.42	3.13±0.46	4.13±0.38	5.67±0.93	4.35±0.45	3.04±0.23

F Ratio: F=3.11, P<0.05 for live births; F=2.59, P< 0.05 for surviving children

Mortality

Table 6 shows the infant, child and juvenile mortality rates in the populations covered under the present study are fairly high. It is found that the percent of infant mortality rates, that is, the number of deaths before 1 year of life per 100 live births, are 10.83%, 5.44%, 3.77%, 4.02% and 7.16% in the Chapra, Sanga, Satpari, Tintikiya and Wanang respectively. Thus, it indicates that the infant mortality rates in the present populations are high especially among the Chapra and Wanang. The differences between populations in respect of infant mortality rates are also found to be significant (χ^2=13.86, df=4, P<0.01), which may be associated with the differences in socio-economic conditions of the populations as has been pointed out in the case of the differences in fertility rates. Of course, it warrants further studies to understand the determinants of infant mortality in these populations. Like in the case of infant mortality rate, the child mortality, i.e., number of child deaths aged between 1 and 4 years of life per 100 live births, is found to be very high among the Wanang (13.81%) and Chapra (13.72%), and it is followed the Sanga (8.37%), Satpari (7.55%) and Tintikiya (8.58%). The chi-square value indicates that these inter-population differences in child mortality rates are significant (χ^2=9.56, df=4, P<0.05). With regard to juvenile mortality rate i.e., number of child deaths aged between 4 and 14 years of life per 100 live births, it is found to be highest among the Satpari (9.91%) and lowest among the Wanang (3.58%). Thus, it indicates that there is a wide variation between populations in juvenile mortality as well, although it is not significant (χ^2=8.91, df=4, P>0.05).

Table 6. *Infant, Child and Juvenile Mortality Rates*

Parameters	Chapras	Sanga	Satpari	Tintikiya	Wanang
Number of mothers	84	67	57	88	97
Number of live births	277	239	212	373	391
Number of infant deaths (death <1 year of life)	30	13	8	15	28
Number of child deaths (deaths between 1 and 4 years of life)	38	20	16	32	54
Juvenile deaths (deaths between 5 and 14 years of life)	17	15	21	27	14
Infant mortality rate (%)	10.83	5.44	3.77	4.02	7.16
Child mortality rate (%)	13.72	8.37	7.55	8.58	13.81
Juvenile mortality rate (%)	6.14	6.28	9.91	7.24	3.58

Reproductive Wastage

The reproductive wastage (abortions and still births) for the Koch populations of the present study is given in Table 7. It is seen that the rate of reproductive wastage is fairly high in the present populations, although it is lower in the Wanang (4.00%) and Sanga (4.05%). It is highest among the Chapra (8.42%), followed by the Satpari (6.19%) and Tintikiya (5.57%). These differences in reproductive wastage is found to be insignificant (χ^2=6.83, df=4, P>0.01). The abortion rates are found to be 4.71%, 1.21%, 4.87%, 3.54% and 2.00% in the Chapra, Sanga, Satpari, Tintikiya and Wanang, respectively. The frequencies of still births to these populations are found to be 3.70%, 2.83%, 1.33%, 2.03% and 2.00% respectively. Thus, it indicates that the still birth is higher than the abortion rate in the Sanga, and it is more or less same in the case of the Wanang. In other populations, the abortion rate is higher than the still birth rate. It has been observed that all the subgroups are characterized by high tendency of village exogamy.

Table 7. *Reproductive Wastage*

Parameters	Chapra	Sanga	Satpari	Tintikiya	Wanang
Number of mothers	84	67	57	88	97
Number of pregnancies	297	247	226	395	400
Number of live births	277	239	212	373	391
Number of abortions	14	3	11	14	8
Number of still births	11	7	3	8	8
Abortion Rate (%)	4.71	1.21	4.87	3.54	2.00
Still birth Rate (%)	3.70	2.83	1.33	2.03	2.00
Reproductive wastage (%)	8.42	4.05	6.19	5.57	4.00

Village Endogamy

Table 8 shows the frequency of village endogamy in terms of the number of marriages taking place within the village and outside the village. The Table shows that the frequency of marriage outside the village, i.e., one of the spouses is from outside the village, is more than 50% in all the subgroups, and it is very high among the Chapra (72.94%), Wanang (71.72%) and Tintikiya (56.67%). This variation in village exogamy between the subgroups is highly significant (χ^2 =10.88, df=4, P<0.001), i.e., it varies from 53% for the Satpari to 73% for the Chapra. The Chi-square values for each subgroup indicate that village exogamy is significantly higher than village endogamy in the Chapra (χ^2=17.89, df =1, P<0.001), Sanga (χ^2=4.31, df =1, P<0.05) and Wanang (χ^2=18.68, df =1, P<0.001). In case of the Satpari and Tintikiya, there is no difference between village endogamy and village exogamy, i.e., about 50% of the marriages in these two groups may be considered as taking place within village, although village exogamy is higher than village endogamy. Nevertheless, it is obvious from the present findings that village endogamy is very low in comparison with other populations of Meghalaya like the War Khasi (Khongsdier 2001). As such it is expected that the genetic variation between these populations should be low as there should be a continuous gene flow among them.

Table 8. *Marriage within and Outside the Village*

Marriage	Chapra	Sanga	Satpari	Tintikiya	Wanang
Within village %	23	25	27	39	28
	27.06	37.31	47.37	43.33	28.28
Outside village %	62	42	30	51	71
	72.94	62.69	52.63	56.67	71.72
Total	85	67	57	90	99
Chi-square value	17.89**	4.31*	0.16	1.60	18.68**

Chi-square value=10.88, df=4, *P<0.05, **P <0.001

Admixture Rate

In fact, Table 9 shows that the admixture rate, calculated according to Lasker (1952), is very high in all the Koch subgroups of the present study. It varies from 28.72% among the Satpari to 45.20% among the Wanang. It may be mentioned that the high admixture rate (Table 9) was based on the number of individuals migrated from one village to another village within and between the Koch subgroups through marital relationship. The marital relationship with other populations like Garo, Hajong, Rabha, Dalu, Mann etc., is found to be 11.76%, 7.46%, 3.51% and 4.04% in the Chapra, Sanga, Satpari, Tintikiya and Wanang, respectively. Thus, it clearly indicates that most of the marriages take place within and between the Koch Subgroups only.

Table 9. *Admixture Rate Between Villages*

Marriage	Chapra	Sanga	Satpari	Tintikiya	Wanang
Both parents from the same village	128	133	133	206	109
One of the parents from another village	120	112	79	152	216
Both of the parents from another villa8ge	62	42	30	51	71
Total number of persons	310	287	242	409	396
Admixture Rate (%)	39.35	34.15	28.72	31.05	45.20

Genetic Drift

From the evolutionary point of view, changes in gene frequencies due to random genetic drift or random sampling are considered to be important in small isolated population. In the present study we have calculated the variance due to genetic drift according to Wright (1931, 1943), which is as follows:

$$V^2dq = \{q (1-q)\} /2N_e$$

where V^2dq is the variance due to drift, q stands for the gene frequency (here taken as 0.5), and N_e is the effective population size.

Following the above method, the results are presented in Table 10. There exist differences in different variables in different populations.

Table 10. *Breeding Size, Effective Population Size, Coefficient of Breeding Isolation and Variance due to Genetic Drift*

Population	Breeding size (N)	Effective population size (N_e)	Coefficient of breeding isolation (N_eM)	Variance due to genetic drift (where q=0.5)
Chapra	121	100.10	39.3894	0.001249
Sanga	105	75.70	25.8524	0.001651
Satpari	86	55.20	15.8530	0.002265
Tintikiya	149	94.33	29.2887	0.001325
Wanang	151	97.26	43.6903	0.001285

Selection Intensity

Natural selection is one of the most powerful evolutionary forces, which brings about changes in the genetic composition of a population. It is operating in human populations through differential fertility and mortality. Assuming that some phenotypic variation in reproduction has a genetic basis and fitness is heritable, Crow (1958) has proposed an index which is known as Index of Total Selection Intensity (now called the Index of Opportunity for Selection), taking into consideration the differential fertility and mortality. In the present study, we have followed the method suggested by Crow (1958) for calculating the total selection intensity. We have also followed the modified version suggested by Johnston and Kensinger (1971).

Table 11 shows the parameters used in calculating the index of selection intensity. It may be noted that for calculating this index, we have taken into consideration only those mothers who are aged 40 years and above since fertility declines drastically when the mothers reach this age. It may be noted that this has been observed in other populations as well (Das and Ghosh1988, Khongsdier 2001). Table 11 shows that the mean number of live births per mother varies from 4.76 among the Chapra to 6.00 among the Wanang, whereas the proportion of child deaths (i.e., deaths before reproductive age) varies from 0.2048 for the Tintikiya to 0.2727 among the Chapra. The proportion of embryonic deaths is found to vary from 0.0318 among the Sanga to 0.0708 among the Tintikiya.

On the basis of these parameters, we have calculated the selection intensity according to the methods suggested by Crow (1958) and Johnston and Kensinger (1971). Table 12 shows that the index of total selection intensity (I), calculated according to Crow's formula, varies from 0.4776 among the Wanang to 0.7999 among the Chapra. It indicates that the differential mortality contributes more towards the total selection intensity among the Chapra (0.3749), Satpari (0.3678), Tintikiya (0.2575), and Wanang (0.2985), but in the case of Sanga it is differential fertility which contributes more towards total selection intensity. Nevertheless, it indicates by and large that differential mortality contributes more towards selection intensity in the Koch population as generally observed in the other Indian populations (Reddy and Chopra 1990).

Table 11. *Parameters Used in Calculating Index of Selection Intensity*

Parameters	Chapra	Sanga	Satpari	Tintikiya	Wanang
Number of mothers aged 40 yrs and above	37	31	24	38	29
Number of conceptions	186	157	126	226	180
Number of live births	176	152	119	210	174
Number of embryonic deaths	10	5	7	16	6
Mean number of live births per women aged 40yrs and above ($\bar{X}$)	4.7568	4.9032	4.9583	5.5263	6.0000
Variance in number of live births due to fertility (V_f)	6.9949	6.9261	4.7899	7.4072	4.9655
Proportion of child deaths (i.e., deaths before 15 yrs of age P_d	0.2727	0.2171	0.2689	0.2048	0.2299
Proportion of survivors, birth to reproductive age ($P_s=1-P_d$)	0.7273	0.7829	0.7311	0.7952	0.7701
Proportion of embryonic deaths (P_{ed})	0.0538	0.0318	0.0556	0.0708	0.0333
Proportion of survivors, birth to reproductive age ($P_b=1-P_{ed}$)	0.9462	0.9682	0.9444	0.9292	0.9667

Table 12 also shows the index of total selection intensity calculated according to the method suggested by Johnston and Kensinger (1971). It is seen that, like in the case of Crow's formula, the value of I varies from 0.5284 among the Wanang to 0.9022 among the Chapra. It indicates that the I value according to Johnston and Kensinger's method are higher than those calculated according to Crow's formula for all the Koch subgroups of the present study. This may be due to the fact that in the modified version of Johnston and Kensinger, we have taken into account the embryonic deaths, i.e., reproductive wastage which includes abortions and still births.

Table 12. *Indices of Opportunity for Selection*

Population	According to Crow (1958)			According to Johnston and Kensinger (1971)			
	I_m	I_f	I	I_{me}	I_{mc}	I_f	I
Chapra	0.3749	0.3091	0.7999	0.0569	0.3749	0.3091	0.9022
Sanga	0.2773	0.2881	0.6453	0.0328	0.2773	0.2881	0.6993
Satpari	0.3678	0.1948	0.6343	0.0589	0.3678	0.1948	0.7305
Tintikiya	0.2575	0.2425	0.5625	0.0762	0.2575	0.2425	0.6815
Wanang	0.2985	0.1379	0.4776	0.0344	0.2985	0.1379	0.5284

Discussion

It has long been suggested that the biological variation between and within human populations is due to the cumulative effect of various evolutionary forces like mutation, selection, genetic drift and gene flow over a period of time. On the basis of demographic data, the present study reveals that the Chapra population tends to

be regressive characterized with low fertility rates on the other hand, the Sanga, Satpari and Tintikiya populations are of stationary type characterized with low fertility rates or due to the adoption of family planning, while the Wanang population appears to be of progressive type characterized by high fertility rates. The overall sex ratio is lower in these Koch subgroups, which is indicative of higher mortality in males than in females among the Sanga, Satpari and Tintikiya.

It is found that about 94% of the marriages took place within the Koch subgroups only i.e., only 6% of the total marriages took place with other populations. This clearly shows that the Koch populations of West Garo Hills are highly endogamous.

Number of never-pregnant women is more in the Chapra, Sanga and Satpari than that of the Tintikiya and Wanang. Side by side, young dependency ratio and child women ratio both are highest among the Wanang and lowest among the Chapra. Mean number of live births to women of all ages living in wedlock varies between 2.08 ± 0.24 for the Chapra and 3.42 ± 0.33 for the Wanang, and the mean number of surviving children varies from 1.41 ± 0.17 among the Chapra to 2.75 ± 0.26 among the Tintikiya. These differences in live births and surviving children between the Koch subgroups may be due to the differences in socioeconomic status and adoption of family planning methods among them. There exists statistically significant difference in respect of infant and child mortality between the populations. This again may be due to the differences in socio-economic conditions of the populations.

It may however be noted that variances shown in Table 10 are based on the assumption that all the Koch subgroups of the present study are endogamous. But we have already seen that the admixture rates between and within the Koch subgroups are fairly high. Thus, drift may not play much role in these Koch subgroups of Garo hills. In fact, Wright (1931) has clearly pointed out the importance of migration in neutralizing the effect of genetic drift in human populations. According to Wright (1940), the differentiation in gene frequency due to genetic drift depends on the coefficient of breeding isolation, i.e., the product of effective population size and admixture rate. In a population with an allele frequency of 0.5, genetic differentiation due to drift is very great where N_eM is less than 0.5, genetic differentiation is still important where N_eM is less than 5, but differentiation due to genetic drift is slight where N_eM is greater than 50. In the present study, the coefficient of breeding isolation varies from 16 among the Satpari to 44 among the Wanang. Thus, it suggests that differentiation in allele frequency due to genetic drift is not so important in all the Koch subgroups of the present study, although it may still important in the Satpari population.

Having reviewed the values of I calculated according to Crow's formula it is likely that opportunity for selection is very high among the Chapra; it is in moderate intensity in the Sanga and Satpari. On the other hand, the opportunity for natural selection seems to be mild in the case of Tintikiya and Wanang.

Conclusions

Anthropodemographic study is conducted among five subgroups of Koch population (Chapra, Sanga, Satpari, Tintikiya and Wanang) residing in Meghalaya. The subgroups mainly marry within their own group practicing endogamy. The populations are characterized with lower persons in old age groups. As these subgroups vary in terms of socio-economic conditions differences exist among themselves in mean number of live births and surviving children. Similarly, these subgroups also vary in terms of infant, child and juvenile mortality. Allele frequency differentiation is not much due to genetic drift among them. Selection intensity in these groups vary from mild to very high. In fine, this study warrants further study on different factors affecting population dynamics among these subgroups of Koch population.

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Modern Opportunities to Develop the Identity of Historical Lands in Latvia

*By Silvija Ozola**

Summary of the Study*: throughout history, in the historical regions of Latvia, which are historically formed parts of Latvia characterized by a unique cultural environment, the common identity of its inhabitants has been Latvianness, which is open to interaction with ethnic minorities. The Latvians constitute a prominent division of the group of peoples known as the Balts whose ancestors came from the south in the early 2ⁿᵈ millennium BC and around 1800 BC, gradually entered areas inhabited by Finno-Ugric (Baltic-Finnic) tribes. The lands of the Balts and Baltic Finns could be distinguished from 1600 BC. The Baltic Sea coastal area of Northern Kurzeme on the side of the Gulf of Riga is the Livonian Coast (Livonian: Līvõd Rānda, Latvian: Lībiešu krasts). The Livs lived in the coastal zone of Vidzeme /the Middle Land/ and the northern part of the Courland Peninsula. The West Baltic tribe Cours or Curonians inhabited Kurzeme (Latin: Curonia, Curlandia, German: Kurland, Livonian: Kurāmō) in the western part of Latvia. The East Baltic tribe Latgalians, or Lettigallians called Latvians inhabited the eastern part of Latvia or Latgale (Latin: Lettgallia, Latgalian: Latgola, Russian: Лотыгольская земля, Лотыгола, German: Lettgallen) north of the Daugava River. The Cours with the Latgalians created the Semigallian tribe belonged to the Eastern Baltic language group. The Semigallians inhabited Zemgale (Latin: Semigallia, German: Semgallen, Semegallen lant, Polish: Semigalia, Lithuanian: Žiemgala, Livonian: Zemgāl) south of the Daugava in the southern part of Latvia. The Selonians or Upper people inhabited the southeastern part of Latvia or Sēlija (Latin: Selonia), earlier Sēla, Sēlene Land (Latin: terra Selonia, terra, que Selen dicitur, German: Sêlen lant) called Augšzeme (Lithuanian: Aukšzemė) or Highland. **Research goal**: analysis of the cultural environment in historical lands of Latvia to preserve the identity of ethnic indigenous people. **Research problem**: opportunities to develop the identity of historical Latvian regions today have not been sufficiently studied. **Novelty**: analysis of the impact of the Law on Historical Regions of Latvia (entry into force on 01.07.2021) on the development of historical regions in Latvia. **Methods**: analysis of documents, cartographic material (Map of Latvia with the boundaries of historical lands, 2020), and published literature studies (Local Government Law, 2022; Law on Historical Regions of Latvia, 2021; Law on Administrative Territories and Populated Areas, 2020; Official Language Law, 1999; On Free Development of Latvia's National and Ethnic Groups and Their Right to Cultural Autonomy, 1991; The Constitution of the Republic of Latvia, 1922).*

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Introduction

The Latvian nation was formed on the cultural and linguistic base of indigenous peoples of the Cours, Latgalians, Selonians, and Semigallians, and the native population of Livonians or Livs. Latvian tribes and Livs formerly inhabited the northern and central parts of Latvia named Vidzeme (Livonian: *Vidūmō*, Lithuanian: *Vidžemė*, Polish: *Liwonia*, Estonian: *Läti Liivimaa*, German: *Zentral-Livland*). The Balts were divided into the Western, Eastern, and Dnieper Balts. The Cours who belonged to East Prussian culture inhabited the Curonian Spit and most of the Courland Peninsula. In the 1st century AD, coming from the southwest and south, the Semigallians superior in military and cultural terms appeared near the Gulf of Rīga and moved Finnish tribes to the north. In the Mude River Basin's area, members of the Latgalians were traceable archaeologically safe since the 6th– 7th centuries. The eastern part of Latgalian lands was mentioned as Latigola. The western part was called Letija (Latin: *Lettia*) in the 13th-century Latin texts. The Selonians managed Selonia, the association of castle districts on the Daugava left bank. Indigenous peoples had developed their states by the late 12th century, or at least the process of state formation was nearing completion. Trade routes connecting Northern Europe with areas to the southeast formed a network of road tracing. It left an impact on economic growth and local people's well-being today. In the 12th century, Latvian tribes had a sufficiently high level of political culture and a well-developed and strictly organized national life. There was no united Latvian nation in the 12th and 13th centuries. The Latvian nation was formed based on the culture and language of the Cours, Latgalians, Selonians, and Semigallians, as well as the ancient inhabitants of Livs. Now, one of the important issues is to create a connection between the human past in different cultural-historical regions with unique environments, different features of Latvianness, traditions, types of language, and the development of modern Latvia.

Each historical Latvian region has distinctive features of Latvianness, traditions, language varieties, and a unique cultural-historical environment. As a result of the unification of the Latvian nation and the formation of national self-awareness, the Republic of Latvia was proclaimed on 18 November 1918 by uniting the historical Latvian regions of Latgale, Kurzeme, Sēlija, Vidzeme, and Zemgale. Unified and indivisible Latvia within the borders established by international treaties is one of the inviolable elements of the constitutional identity of the Latvian State, which guarantees the existence and sustainability of the Latvian nation. The Constitution of the Republic of Latvia adopted on 15 February 1922 and entered into force on 7 November 1922 says: 'The State of Latvia, proclaimed on 18 November 1918, has been established by uniting historical Latvian regions and based on the unwavering will of the Latvian nation to have its State and its inalienable right of self-determination to guarantee the existence and development of the Latvian nation, its language, and culture throughout the centuries, to ensure freedom and promote the welfare of the people of Latvia and each individual'.

The people of Latvia did not recognize occupation regimes, resisted them, and regained their freedom by restoring national independence on 4 May 1990 based on the continuity of the State. Latvian and Liv traditions, Latvian folk wisdom, the

Latvian language, and universal human and Christian values shape the identity of Latvia in the European cultural space. The Constitution of the Republic of Latvia forms language policy and affirms the rights of ethnic minorities to preserve and develop their languages in Latvia (Constitutional Assembly 1922). The foundations of a cohesive society are loyalty to Latvia, the Latvian language as the only official language, freedom, equality, solidarity, justice, honesty, work ethic, and family. On Free Development of Latvia's National and Ethnic Groups and Their Right to Cultural Autonomy entered into force on 19 March 1991. This law says that the Latvian nation, ancient people Livs, and national and ethnic groups reside in the Republic of Latvia (Parliament 1991). In 1994, the Law on Municipalities was adopted. The Official Language Law entered into force on 1 September 2000. Its purpose is to ensure the maintenance, protection, and development of the Latvian language, and the preservation of the cultural and historic heritage of the Latvian nation. There are three dialects in Latvian: the Livonian dialect, High Latvian, and the Middle dialect. To this day, the differences between the southern part of Kurzeme, where the natives speak the Middle dialect, and the northern part, where the natives speak a fragment of the Livonian dialect, have remained. The indigenous people of Sēlija still today speak the High Latvian dialect. The State shall ensure the maintenance, protection, and development of the Liv language and Latgalian written language as a historical variant of the Latvian language. The Official Language Law accept the Liv language as 'the language of the indigenous population'. All other languages are considered foreign (Parliament 1999).

In 2018, 39 out of 110 counties and 2 out of 9 cities of republican importance no longer met the previously established criteria for the number of municipality residents. The government determined to reduce the number of municipalities and planned to develop a new administrative territory and settlement law to ensure more efficient management. Balanced development of territories requires the creation of new administrative regions. In 2019, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development developed a document for administrative-territorial reform, according to it financially independent municipalities will emerge, which will be able to solve not only issues related to infrastructure and buildings but will also allow providing social services. Architects and professional urban planners were not invited to develop administrative-territorial reform. Organizing a major reform requires gaining an evidence-based conviction about its benefits and harms and their balance. The council of the Latvian Academy of Sciences analyzed the possible most important benefits and sought answers to many questions. Director of the Institute of Latvian History of the University of Latvia Guntis Zemītis explained that boundaries of cultural and historical regions have been formed over time. There is a deep cultural layer beneath them. Neither wars nor deportations have been able to destroy the linguistic heritage left by ancient peoples. The dialect will not disappear, whatever the boundaries of the counties. The state language will be Latvian, and the dialect will be kept alive by tradition. It is not good to divide small counties, which have formed as cultural and historical sites and are different in tradition, but not in dialect. This would lead to the destruction of the uniqueness of such regions. Of course, it is good if administrative borders coincide with the historical ones, but a planning region is not quite the same as a cultural-historical county. Guntis Zemītis

think administrative-territorial reform will deform the historical Latvian regions of Sēlija and Zemgale the most. Scientists recommended postponing the implementation of administrative-territorial reform.

On 10 June 2020, the Saeima, which is the parliament of the Republic of Latvia, adopted the Law on Administrative Territories and Populated Areas in its final reading and accepted the proposal of the President of Latvia (2019–2023) Egils Levits that the ownership of cities and parishes in Latvian historical lands (Latvian: *Latviešu vēsturiskās zemes*) or cultural regions of Latvia (Latvian: *Latvijas kultūrvēsturiskie novadi*) – Vidzeme, Latgale, Kurzeme, Zemgale, and Sēlija (Figure 1) will regulate by a separate law to strength common identity among residents and preserve and sustainably develop the cultural-historical environment, belonging of towns and rural territories to historical Latvian lands.

Figure 1. *Geographer Jānis Turlajs, Historian Guntis Zemītis, Demographer, Historian Ilmārs Mežs. Map of Latvia with Historical Latvian Regions and its Boundaries, 2020 (Turlajs et al. 2020)*

The Law on Administrative Territories and Populated Areas entered into force on 23 June 2020. It defines the historical Latvian regions of Vidzeme, Latgale, Kurzeme, Zemgale, and Sēlija. The Preamble of the law includes historical aspects of the formation of the Latvian nation and emphasizes the diversity of Latvian identity and cultural space of historical Latvian lands. The Law on Administrative Territories and Populated Areas determines a new territorial division of Latvia, the status of populated areas and their keeping records, does not provide for the establishment of multi-level local governments and prescribes procedures for modifying borders and the establishment of centers of administrative territories and territorial units and supports local communities in preserving and developing their cultural and historical identity. It aims to strengthen the identity of the population and their belonging to historical Latvian lands. Therefore, it is necessary to create

prerequisites for everyone to form a closer connection with one of the historical Latvian lands and belong to them while ensuring the joint and successful development of all of Latvia and each historical land. In the President's opinion, a horizontal policy and cooperation of society, the state, and local governments are important for achieving the goals of this law. A plan will be created to develop historical regions and cultural spaces (Parliament 2020).

The Creation of a New Administrative-Territorial Division of Latvia

The commonwealth of the Latvian nation and the preservation and development of the Liv identity, culture, and language must be supported at the national level. Each community belonging to a historical region of Latvia and promoting its sustainability has the right and obligation to nurture and develop its cultural and historical environment and common identity to preserve and pass it on to future generations. The State and local governments must facilitate favorable socio-economic circumstances for the existence and growth of local communities, which maintain the identity of historical regions and cultural spaces in their daily lives. Historical Latvian regions have borders marked by the belonging of local communities. This must be taken into account in matters of the State. President Egils Levits prepared a draft law on Latvian cultural and historical regions to realize that the diversity of Latvianness is not self-evident. The draft law determined the role and responsibilities of the state and local governments regarding the sustainable development of the Liv and Latgalian identity. The territorial identity of modern Latgale can be traced back to the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries. The indigenous people of Latgale still speak the Latgalian language, which is an Eastern Baltic language of the Indo-European language family. It is important to think not only at the ethnographic but also at the level of administration and planning about preserving what is characteristic of each historical region. The execution of the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia is also necessary. Necessary to achieve a real fulfillment of the Official Language Law. It defines the state's obligations regarding the preservation and development of the Latgalian language.

By 1 January 2021, the Cabinet of Ministers developed a draft law to create new administrative regions in Vidzeme, Latgale, Kurzeme, and Zemgale. It provides for the transfer to 42 municipalities, many of which were in the territories of former districts. The need for administrative-territorial reform is justified by expected benefits such as the average income of the united municipality, calculated per inhabitant, being higher than before. The funds available to local governments will concentrate on offering higher quality services and implementing larger projects. Productivity in the public sector will increase. There will be more resources for the modernization of the old infrastructure and the construction of the new one. Combining counties can serve as a platform for introducing positive changes to improve the education system, social protection, health care and road infrastructure. Innovation will reduce red tape. Administrative-territorial reform must become a turning point in the development of Latvia. Counties will be united to make them stronger. A new division of counties will ensure greater economic equality. Not all

deputies of the Saeima believed that this prepared compromise option would be able to guarantee it. Revision of county borders proudly called administrative-territorial reform is a proposal artificially created at the desk. Many of the consequences of the careless drawing of borders are visible today in the world. Such geographical curiosities are the most frequent causes of endless conflicts. In this case, educated Rīga residents need a self-satisfying explanation. They often do not understand or do not want to know why so many in the countryside do not accept this reform and consider their satisfactory version of the truth to be the truth. The Law on Historical Regions of Latvia was submitted for approval to the Saeima.

People opposed the municipal reform, which was planned to bring self-sufficient municipalities under a merger. Protests were organized. Participants of protest actions support improvement processes in the state and municipalities but this reform is undemocratic, thoughtless, and economically unjustified. The Constitution of the Republic of Latvia states that Latvia is an independent democratic republic. The deputies who unconditionally pushed forward poorly prepared administrative-territorial reform violated Chapter 1. Residents did not give up and submitted a claim to the Constitutional Court. Competent architects and urban planners were not involved in territorial planning processes, and instead, the Constitutional Court indicated that each county needed a development center. Now, there is no need for professional urban planners, and a requirement is to follow the instructions of the Constitutional Court. President Egils Levits announced the law to perform administrative-territorial reform, despite the call of local government leaders to the President to do the opposite. The Law on Historical Regions of Latvia, which regulates the borders of administrative regions, was adopted on 16 June 2021. It is a political decision not based on serious scientific research and made from a 'position of strength'. From 1 July 2021, long-standing and controversial administrative-territorial reform, reducing the number of municipalities, provides for determining the ownership of each parish and city to one of the historical Latvian regions of Vidzeme, Latgale, Kurzeme, Zemgale, and Sēlija, and also deals with small cultural spaces (Parliament 2021). Local Government Law entered into force on 1 January 2023. It regulates the operation of local governments, determines autonomous functions of the local government, as well as the procedures for implementation of delegated functions and voluntary initiatives, to ensure democratic, legal, efficient, sustainable, open, and publicly accessible administration within the administrative territory of each local government and balanced access to local government services (Parliament 2022).

The Implementation of Administrative-Territorial Reform in Historical Latvian Regions

It is necessary to promote learning of the Latgalian and Liv languages and to use place names in these languages in the historical environment and informative space. In February 2023, the first indication in the Liv language was opened with the participation of the President. On the Livonian Coast, the installation of village signs began at the end of 2023. Indications in the Liv language will be visible not

only when visiting Liv villages, but also when driving along the large Kolkas–Ventspils highway, on which a sign announcing the arrival on the Livonian Coast is already visible. Step by step installing signs in the Liv language will continue on national roads. The Vidzeme Liv Center will be strengthened in 2024 and 2025 to identify, preserve and reconstruct the intangible cultural heritage of the Livs in Vidzeme. Liv events and experience trips to cultural heritage promoters will unite the Livs and create prerequisites for the healthy development of the entire Liv community and to implementation of ideas. New opportunities are being sought to popularize the contemporary culture and traditions on the Livonian Coast and to create interest in the manifestations of the Livonian cultural heritage in traditions, modern Liv culture, art and music.

Changes are taking place in Latgale, where place names in the Latgalian language have appeared. Parishes are united to create larger administrative units. People are concerned about road infrastructure, availability of services and equal representation of residents of current parishes in newly formed counties. Parishes are located in rural areas. They have no independent decision-making power and budget. Fewer funds are allocated to the countryside, as more is invested in centers and cities. The countryside has a surplus principle.

Conclusions

Today, there are opportunities to preserve the identity of historical lands in Latvia. The Cabinet of Ministers adopted several laws, including the Law on Historical Regions of Latvia, and they complement each other. The main goal of administrative- territorial reform is to promote positive changes, balancing regional development, the availability of quality municipal services regardless of the residence place and reducing the inequality gap among municipalities. However, national problems are strengthened by the law, if a deep and comprehensive analysis of the situation is not carried out and a low-quality law is developed spontaneously. This is a circumstance that can seriously hinder the balanced development of territories.

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