Kristijan Fidanovski
Department of Social Policy and Intervention, University of Oxford, UK

FROM A DEMOGRAPHIC TREND TO A POLICY PROBLEM: THE FRAMING OF LOW FERTILITY BY PRONATALIST GOVERNMENTS IN NORTH MACEDONIA (2009) AND SERBIA (2018; 2022)

Abstract

This paper examines the government discourses around low fertility in North Macedonia (2009) and Serbia (2018; 2022), which have introduced some of the most generous (relative to income) pronatalist child benefit packages in modern European history. Contributing to the literature on the politics of ideas around demographic processes and identity politics more broadly, we examine the transformation of low fertility into a policy problem through four discursive frames: (1) socioeconomic; (2) patriotic; (3) ethnic; (4) moral. Using the Frame Analysis method, we assess the construction of these frames through the techniques of "frame amplification," "frame bridging," "frame extension," and "frame transformation".

We examine 58 pieces of pronatalist government discourse derived from parliamentary debates, government press conferences and TV campaigns around the introduction and (in the case of Serbia) expansion of the support packages. We find considerable evidence of socioeconomic and (especially) patriotic and moral framing of low fertility in both countries, but we only find evidence of ethnic framing in Serbia. We suggest that the presence of the socioeconomic, patriotic, and moral frames in both countries might be due to the confluence of demographic decline, contested nation-building, and conservative ideology of ruling parties and (a majority of) citizens. We also argue that the dominance of the patriotic and moral frames in both countries suggests that their pronatalism is more rooted in identity politics than in demographic realities. Finally, we posit that the divergence on the ethnic frame might be attributable to differences in party competition and interethnic relations.

Keywords: low fertility, pronatalism, politics of ideas, identity politics, frame analysis, North Macedonia, Serbia

Introduction and Motivation

In recent decades, fertility rates have been falling dramatically across Europe, reaching levels well below the population replacement level of 2.1 children per woman. The rapid rate of population aging and decline has been accompanied by a growing embrace of pronatalism – "intentional government discourse and action directed at influencing the fertility rate of a given population upward" (Togman 2019: 3). According to the World Population Prospects database[1], 55 countries in the world (28%) declared themselves as pronatalist in 2019, up from 9% in 1976 (United Nations 2021: 5); almost half of them (27) are in Europe. However, the correlation between fertility declines and pronatalist government responses should not be mistaken for a causal – let alone "natural" – relationship.

First, this correlation, while strong, is far from perfect. As many as 16 European countries, some of which have been rejecting the very premise that governments should influence fertility in any direction (Gauthier 1996), do not declare themselves as pronatalist despite their sub-replacement fertility rates (United Nations 2021). Moreover, even when governments *do* embrace pronatalism in their discourse and/or policy, this often occurs decades after the fertility rate has fallen below replacement, and not necessarily when births are at their all-time-lowest level (Seeleib-Kaiser &Toivonen 2011), suggesting that pronatalism is hardly a direct response to unfavourable demographic trends.

We thus treat pronatalism as a(n) (at least partly) *constructed entity*. We posit that the contested nature of the societal and individual implications of low fertility, as well as their complexity and potential unfamiliarity to the public, might require pronatalist policymakers to perform a discursive legitimisation of pronatalism as a political orientation and policy strategy. Accepting this premise opens numerous questions and guides this study to two particular ones: (1) What concerns about low fertility are articulated by pronatalist policymakers? (2) How do pronatalist policymakers make use of discursive techniques to frame low fertility as a policy problem through the articulation of said concerns?

Discourse is commonly defined as "a set of subjective interpretations by language users of situations or events" (van Dijk 2006: 121). When applied to policy, it is typically divided into a "coordinative discourse", where policy actors coordinate with each other regarding an *ongoing* policy-making process, and a "communicative discourse", where political actors (who may or may not overlap with the policy

---

[1] The database is compiled based on a survey filled out by governments around the world, usually through their social affairs ministries, health ministries, and/or national statistical offices. Among other questions, governments are asked to describe the current fertility rate in their countries (as too low, satisfactory, or too high), as well as their own policy orientation towards it (raise, no intervention, or lower). Other data points include national plans and strategies, programme reports, legislative documents, official statements, etc.

actors above) seek to communicate to the public the necessity and appropriateness of *already -designed* policies (Schmidt 2008: 7-8). This study is interested in the communicative discourse around pronatalism. Moreover, as pronatalism manifests itself primarily through the welfare state, this study also seeks to contribute to the ongoing shift in the comparative welfare state literature toward a growing recognition of the importance of ideas and discourse (Beland 2016). Family policy, in particular, is "a domain in which the politics of ideas and ideational change are particularly pronounced, as they relate to competing values about the social order of society, in terms of public and private responsibilities, gender roles, and the appropriate way to raise children" (Fleckenstein &MohunHimmelweit 2023).

Pronatalist discourses might contain references to any of the numerous socio-economic rationales for pronatalism documented in the demography literature. As summarised compellingly by Gietel-Basten (2023: 5), these include counteracting shrinking labour supply to facilitate economic growth (Lee et al. 2014); mitigating the challenges to health and welfare systems (Lee & Mason 2012), minimising the growing emergence of sparsely populated areas (OECD 2022); maintaining cultural diversity (Signes-Pont et al. 2022), and managing the provision of ecosystem services (Bruno et al. 2021) and infrastructure services (Franklin et al. 2018), such as water (Hummel & Lux 2007) and transport (Canzler 2008).

However, the political science literature invites the assumption that pronatalism might not be primarily framed in such palpable terms by its discursive proponents. In fact, one of the most pervasive trends in the politics of developed countries over the past few decades has been the rise of "identity politics" (Fukuyama 2018). Broadly understood as a shift away from material concerns towards identity-based concerns, identity politics has been linked to major recent political developments, such as Donald Trump's victory in the US presidential election (Sides et al. 2016) and the Brexit referendum (Pickup et al. 2021). Identity politics encapsulates the growing salience of the cultural (libertarian vs conservative) cleavage over the economic (redistributionist vs neoliberal) cleavage on the two-dimensional ideological axis as a driver of voting decisions across contemporary Europe (e.g., Norris & Inglehart 2019). If this broader political trend extends to pronatalism, then one can expect pronatalist discourses to be dominated by appeals to conservative considerations around an alleged national and cultural decline rather than by references to socioeconomic concerns around population aging.

This expectation is partly derived from Armitage (2021), who argues that "changes in the size, age structure, geographic distribution, or ethnic composition of populations are couched within the realm of demographic imaginaries". In these imaginaries, which Armitage also links to the more established social-science concepts of "social imaginaries" (Taylor 2002) and "imagined communities" (Anderson 1983), it is "[the] dominant political tropes [of the time], rather than purely

technical considerations around demographic data, [that] are central to the creation and construction of a population crisis". Even in the demography literature, it is firmly recognised that the public (and especially government) discourse around depopulation "is very different from the scientific, neutral concept of population decline, as the [very] term evokes the language of war, devastation, and destruction" (Gietel-Basten 2023: 5).

Case selection

In line with our understanding of pronatalism as a partly constructed entity, we sought to select countries that have been undergoing palpable demographic change *and* the types of political processes that one might expect to yield (some of) the four sets of concerns and associated constructions around low fertility proposed earlier.

One particularly strong candidate for such case studies is Eastern Europe. Over the past three decades, this region has mostly been studied in the social and family policy literature through the notion of "re-traditionalisation" (Hantrains 2004; Javornik 2016; Simic&Simic 2019). Re-traditionalisation refers to the perceived shift in societal norms since the collapse of socialism in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which are (perhaps paradoxically) deemed to have moved in a more traditional direction in recent decades, partly due to the abandonment of atheism as a state doctrine and renewed embrace of religion in societies with high (pre-socialist) historical rates of religious belief (Krastev 2016; Grzymala-Busse 2017; Berman &Snegovaya 2020; Fomina&Kucharczuk 2016; Kornai 2015; Stanley 2019). In terms of social and family policy, re-traditionalisation has led to the familialistic dismantlement of some signature socialist legacies such as high female labour force participation and free public childcare (Shiffman et al. 2002; Ghodsee 2018), partly through an increasing reliance on long maternity leave, with serious negative implications for gender equality (Dobrotic et al. 2013).

Demography has played an important role in this shift, although there is some contestation around whether pronatalism has constituted a driver or a by-product of re-traditionalization (Szalma 2021; Fedor 2022; Driyanska 2021; Varsa&Szikra 2020). In any case, demographic change has been both considerable and particularly rapid in this region, as low fertility rates have been compounded by high rates of emigration (Frejka&Gietel-Basten 2016; Sobotka 2017, all against the backdrop of a comprehensive socio-political transition from socialism and authoritarianism to market economy and democracy (Vanhuysse 2006; 2009; Orenstein 2009; Hanley 2012).

Within this region, we thus sought to select countries: (1) which declare themselves as pronatalist; (2) which have introduced explicitly pronatalist policies that have emerged as prominent in the political discourse; (3) whose populations are declining and aging at a fast rate; (4) whose nation-building processes are highly

contested; (5) whose predominant societal norms are traditional; (6) whose pronatalist discourse is relatively understudied. All six criteria are met by North Macedonia and Serbia, with North Macedonia announcing its pronatalist financial support for parents in 2009 and discontinuing it in 2018, and Serbia introducing a similar and ongoing policy in 2018. What follows is an overview of pronatalist politics and policy in the two countries, which we end by outlining our rationale for conducting a comparative rather than a single-case study.

Overview of pronatalism in North Macedonia and Serbia

Pronatalism in North Macedonia

Between 2006 and 2017, North Macedonia was governed by the conservative party VMRO-DPMNE (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity). In 2009, the VMRO-DPMNE-led government introduced its Third Child Policy, a monthly child benefit of about 8500 Macedonian denar (EUR 140)[2] for each third and fourth child born after the introduction of the policy on May 1,2009 (Gerovska-Mitev 2012; Jakimovska et al. 2016). This was the first (and to this day only) explicitly pronatalist policy intervention in the history of the country. The Third Child Policy benefit was issued irrespective of household income from the birth of the child until the age of 10. At the time of the introduction of the policy and throughout its implementation, the national fertility rate hovered between 1.5 and 1.6 (Macedonian Statistics Agency 2022). North Macedonia is a net emigration country, having lost an estimated 32% of its population to emigration since independence in 1991 (Petreski 2021: 12), with limited gains in immigration. The natural population growth rate (fertility minus mortality) was still mildly positive between 2009 and 2018, but after taking migration into account, North Macedonia's population was rapidly shrinking.

Politically, VMRO-DPMNE was the largest member of a coalition government in the country's parliamentary system. Its junior coalition partner throughout the period of interest, the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), represented the country's ethnic Albanian minority (about 25% of the population). Ethnic relations were fragile, with a limited armed conflict having occurred between the national army and Albanian paramilitary units in 2001. Crucially, the Third Child Policy was initially proposed by VMRO-DPMNE only for municipalities with fertility levels below 2.1, which was perceived as a deliberate attempt to exclude Albanian-majority municipalities. Only after the Constitutional Court deemed its original design to be unconstitutional was the policy expanded to the entire country. North Mace-

---

[2] The generosity level was indexed for inflation and therefore changed over the duration of the policy.

donia used to be part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and became an independent country in 1991. During the period of interest, it was not a member of either NATO or the European Union but had expressed the desire to join both organisations. In addition to the lack of both a clear geopolitical course and a long tradition of statehood, North Macedonia's nation-building process was additionally complicated by its (now-resolved) naming dispute with neighbouring Greece[3].

The Third Child Policy occupied an important role in the official rhetoric of the VMRO-DPMNE-led government. The policy featured heavily in speeches, interviews, parliamentary debates, and the tailormade nine-episode, government-funded TV campaign "Family and Children Are Our Biggest Treasure" aired in 2009. The Third Child Policy, as well as the broader pronatalist orientation of the government, were most commonly associated with Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and the ultra-conservative Member of Parliament Vlatko Gjorchev.

Pronatalism in Serbia

Since 2012, Serbia has been governed by the conservative party SNS (Srpska NaprednaStranka), first as a junior coalition member and then as a senior coalition member since 2014. Like North Macedonia, Serbia used to be part of socialist Yugoslavia and did not become completely independent until 2006 (Gordy 2013). It has a parliamentary political system where the president has a largely ceremonial role. Yet, President Aleksandar Vucic, who has been in office since 2017 after previously serving as Prime Minister, is widely perceived as the most powerful (and increasingly authoritarian) political actor in the country rather than Prime Minister Ana Brnabic (Pavlovic 2020). Like North Macedonia, Serbia is characterised by a recent history of ethnic-based violence during the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s. In 2008, the Albanian-majority province of Kosovo seceded from Serbia and has been recognised as an independent state by most of the international community, although not by Serbia, which also contains minority ethnic groups (mostly Albanian and Romani) within its borders, whose birth rates have traditionally been higher than those of the ethnic Serb majority (Shiffman et al. 2002).

The first pronatalist strategy in Serbia was adopted by a centre-left governing coalition in 2008 (Government of Serbia 2008; Suli 2022) and encompassed various policies such as subsidised childcare and housing loans. However, despite the lack of a formal strategy, pronatalism featured strongly on the political agenda during the wartime period in the 1990s. During this time, pronatalism was framed in an

---

[3] The resolution to the naming dispute in 2018 led to the country's current name, North Macedonia. During the period of interest to this research, the country was internationally known as The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), but the then-constitutional name, Republic of Macedonia, was also used domestically and in bilateral relations with some countries (Fidanovski 2018).

explicitly conservative fashion, as women were portrayed in the political discourse as "mothers of the nation" (Andjelkovic 1998) with a responsibility to "reproduce and renew the Serbian nation" (Cetkovic 1998). In any case, pronatalist policy interventions before SNS rose to power had been characterised by limited financial commitment and flawed implementation. The first iteration of pronatalist policy by SNS, on the other hand, was introduced in April 2018. It consisted of a considerable expansion of the national child benefit system, with the size of the monthly payments being increased to USD 104 for second children, USD 124 for third children, and USD 186 for fourth children. The benefits are issued from birth until the age of 2 for second children and from birth until the age of 10 for third and fourth children. The second iteration of pronatalist policy was introduced in March 2022 and consisted of a threefold increase in the one-off birth grant for first children from USD 1000 to USD 3000 (for first children, no *monthly* support is available). Both iterations are issued irrespective of household income. Like that of North Macedonia, Serbia's fertility rate has long fallen below replacement, hovering around 1.5 children per woman since 2018 and has been experiencing net emigration (Serbian Statistical Agency 2022).

The policies of interest have been formally classified as pronatalist (like in North Macedonia) and have been administered by the Ministry of Family Affairs and Demography, which was established with an explicitly pronatalist mandate in 2020 (unlike in North Macedonia, where they fell under the remit of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare). Pronatalism and low fertility more broadly, and the policies of interest more specifically, are discussed most often by President Vucic and Family Affairs and Demography Minister Ratko Dmitrovic, and have featured heavily in speeches, interviews, parliamentary debates on the topic, and the six-episode TV campaign "Births Now". A noteworthy fact is that the SNS-led government coalition between 2020 and 2022 was named For Our Children (*Za nasudecu*).

Methods and Data

To analyse pronatalist government discourse in North Macedonia and Serbia, we use the qualitative method of Frame Analysis (Beland 2005; Goffman 1974; Lindekilde 2014; Snow &Benford 1988; Snow et al. 1986; see Pierson 1994; Cox 2001 for applications to social policy). While less commonly used than its more traditional alternative for examining social and political discourse, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (e.g., van Dijk 2006), Frame Analysis is better suited to our research objectives. This is because Frame Analysis assumes a high level of strategic rationality among the discursive actors of interest (Lindekilde 2014: 224), therefore lending itself particularly well to an analysis of the way in which pronatalist government officials with a vested interest in legitimising pronatalist policies portray said policies, or the way in which policymakers transform references to the

challenges associated with demographic change into value judgements on demographic "problems" (Gietel-Basten 2023). Specifically, Frame Analysis sheds light on "how particular ideas/ideologies are used deliberately to mobilise supporters and demobilise adversaries vis-à-vis a particular goal" (Snow &Benford 1988). Thus, "frames [themselves] are not policy ideas: they constitute a discourse that helps political actors sell policy choices to the public" (Beland 2005: 12), which makes them particularly well-suited to an analysis of the communicative discourse around already-designed policies. Finally, in contrast to some other discourse-based methods, Frame Analysis has been specifically developed for social science research.

Frame Analysis distinguishes between four framing *techniques*: "frame amplification," "frame bridging," "frame extension", and "frame transformation" in ascending order of ambitiousness of the framing process (Snow et al. 1986). Frame amplification denotes "the clarification and invigoration of an interpretive frame that bears on a particular issue, problem, or set of events" (idem, 469). It typically refers to discursive actors offering only one interpretation of the topic at hand or strongly highlighting said interpretation over other possible interpretations. Frame bridging constitutes the "linkage of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem" (idem, 467). It typically involves linking an evident manifestation or implication of the topic at hand to an event that is unrelated to said topic yet is deemed to resonate in a similar fashion, to a similar audience, and more strongly than the topic at hand. Frame extensions encompass "an effort to incorporate participants by extending the boundaries of the proposed frame to include or encompass the views, interests, or sentiments of targeted groups" (Lindekilde 2014: 208), thus broadening the range of audience members to whom the proposed frame might appeal. Finally, frame transformation is typically required when the proposed frames "may not resonate with, and on occasion may even appear antithetical to, conventional lifestyles or rituals and extant interpretive frames" (Snow et al. 1986, 473). In line with the literature (Snow &Benford 1986; Lindekinde 2014), we expect frame amplification and frame bridging to occur more often than frame extension and frame transformation, as the latter two techniques require a more complex framing process, which in turn carries a larger risk of not being understood by the target audience in the intended fashion.

The full data used in our analysis is outlined in Appendix 1 and consists of 26 pieces of relevant discursive material in North Macedonia and 32 pieces of such material in Serbia. Our data mirrors the somewhat cyclical public attention to low fertility and pronatalism in our two countries, with all 58 pieces of discursive material dating back to specific milestones around the introduction and (in the case of Serbia) expansion of the pronatalist policies of interest. Of the two types of discourse identified earlier (Schmidt 2008), we limit our analysis to the communi-

cative discourse around the already-designed pronatalist policies in the two countries. This is because it has been well-documented that the ruling parties at the time of interest in both countries governed in a top-down fashion with limited public debate and in a considerably controlled media space (Gjuzelov&Hadjievska 2020; Jovanovic 2018). A strong illustration of this is the fact that, in both countries, the government press conferences announcing the policies had taken place before the parliamentary debates (as indicated in Appendix 1 below). The formal adoption of the policy did not seem to depend on the outcome of the parliamentary debates, as the two ruling parties already possessed the parliamentary majority necessary for passing the policies, with MPs in the two countries almost always voting along party lines.

We formulate our frames in line with the four sets of concerns commonly associated with pronatalism in the academic literature summarised earlier. The resulting set of frames provides a comprehensive classification (in terms of our research question) of the discursive material into distinct yet not always mutually exclusive categories, mirroring the sometimes overlapping nature of pronatalist concerns and in line with the mutually interactive relationship of the frames inherent to the Frame Analysis method (Snow &Benford 1986).

To ensure a meaningful comparison, we operate with the same three types of discursive formats in both countries: (1) government press conferences; (2) parliamentary debates (with an exclusive focus on speeches delivered by MPs from the ruling party); and (3) government media campaigns. The combination of discursive material from policy and political actors in the executive (in (1), (3) and to a lesser extent (2)) and legislative branches of government (in (2)) ensures a wide representation of discursive voices. Our 58 "pieces of discursive material" refer to distinct discursive utterances produced by the discursive actors of interest through one of the three types of discursive formats of interest and during the aforementioned policy milestones of interest. Thus, multiple utterances by the same actor produced on the same occasion, such as for instance multiple interventions during a parliamentary debate spread in between interventions from other discursive actors, are counted as separate pieces of discursive material. In Serbia, the pronatalist government discourse in the period of interest was dominated by members of the executive government, with President Aleksandar Vucic and Minister Ratko Dmitrovic making guest appearances at parliamentary debates beyond their participation in government press conferences on the topic. North Macedonia's parliamentary debates on the topic, by contrast, did not include members of the executive government. However, all three discursive formats of interest were observed and thus analysed in both countries.

While the results of the analysis encompass the entire data sample, only 11 (5 for North Macedonia and 6 for Serbia) of the 58 pieces of discursive material are quoted directly in the (next section of the) paper due to reasons of space. These pieces

are highlighted as the most illustrative of their respective frames for each country. The entire discursive material of interest was produced by the discursive actors in the local languages (Macedonian and Serbian respectively), and all quotes in the next section are presented in translation.

Results

This section outlines a selection of our results under our *four frames of low fertility: (1) socioeconomic; (2) patriotic; (3) ethnic; and (4) moral*. Under the socioeconomic frame, we observe rhetoric on the effects of population aging on economic growth, pension systems, healthcare systems, and other related challenges. Under the patriotic frame we identify concerns about the decline of the overall population size and the (perceived) cultural erosion that would ensue from it. The ethnic frame complements the patriotic frame in these highly ethnically polarised societies and refers to the relative decline in the size of the dominant ethnic group with respect to one or more minority ethnic groups. Finally, the moral frame encompasses depictions of childbearing and parenthood as ends in themselves, rather than as a means of mitigating the concerns articulated under the three remaining frames.

Our four frames are rather broadly conceived. For instance, economic growth and the stability of the national healthcare system are somewhat different policy issues, yet they are framed by the discursive actors under the same broad umbrella of (alleged) implications of low fertility for the material well-being of individuals and societies, so we categorise them under the same (socioeconomic) frame. Similarly, the depictions of childbearing and parenthood as ends in itself can be (and indeed are) formulated with explicitly religious underpinnings *or* in completely secular terms. Yet, all such concerns about low fertility are framed through a common overarching conception of childbearing as morally virtuous *per se*, i.e., irrespective of its potential collective (socioeconomic, patriotic, or ethnic) implications, so we categorise said depictions under the same (moral) frame.

All 58 pieces of discursive material of interest contain an example of at least one of the four frames. This means that the relevant discursive actor makes a reference to at least one of these four sets of concerns about low fertility during the relevant discursive occasion (e.g., MD1a: Member of Parliament Silvana Boneva during the April 13, 2019 parliamentary session (as per Appendix 1)). As the four sets of concerns about low fertility are not mutually exclusive, some of the 58 pieces include references to more than one of the four frames.

However, while the frames are therefore not always distinct from one another, they do encompass the full spectrum of concerns articulated with regards to low fertility in our analytical sample. This means that we do not observe any concern about low fertility in our analytical sample that does not relate to one or more of the four frames. Importantly, this is not meant to suggest that *everything* that is said

by the discursive actors in the 58 pieces can be captured under the four frames, but this is because said pieces also contain content that is not relevant to our research questions. Apart from the articulation of concerns about low fertility, which is by some distance the most common type of content in the material and is fully captured by the four frames, the discursive actors at times express their views also on the reasons for current fertility levels and/or their expectations about the effectiveness of pronatalist policy. However, such content is beyond our scope, as it does not provide additional insight into the concerns articulated by policymakers with regards to low fertility, i.e., into their discursive justification of their pronatalist orientation. The material also includes (albeit in very marginal quantity) references to the redistributive advantages of generous child benefits, but these are similarly beyond our scope.

In the remainder of this section, we present some of the content we observed under each of the four frames in both countries. Each frame is presented through the four framing techniques summarised earlier.

The socioeconomic frame of low fertility

Socioeconomic concerns around low fertility generally play a clear yet non-dominant role in the pronatalist government discourses in both countries. Insofar as they are present, however, they are mostly expressed through frame amplification. For example, at the government press conference introducing the policy, Macedonian Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski says:

"(…) Low fertility carries the risk of less growth and investment and all sorts of implications in areas such as healthcare, education, pensions… you name it." (MC1a.; February 2009)[4]

Here, Gruevski alleges a number of (implicitly negative) socioeconomic consequences of low fertility. He amplifies the socioeconomic frame by clarifying the exact social domains that (he believes) would suffer from a continuation of low fertility trends, but he also exercises some caution in his rhetoric. He uses qualifiers such as "carries the risk" (instead of more definitive language, such as for instance, "will cause") and the relatively neutral term "implication".

In Serbia, the socioeconomic frame is similarly marginal compared to the other three frames. Yet, President Aleksandar Vucic amplifies this frame on several occasions (SC2a.; SD2b.), including at the government press conference announcing the policy:

"(…) If our births stay low, we will have to bring in waiters from developed countries, and we already have a shortage of plumbers and mechanics" (SC1a.; February 2018)

---

[4] All notations in brackets refer to Appendix.

Unlike Gruevski in North Macedonia, who focuses on the alleged implications of low fertility, Vucic highlights an allegedly necessary *policy response* to low fertility, albeit one that will presumably only be necessary if the pronatalist child benefits do not increase births in the meantime. Vucic's language is more explicit than Gruevski's ("*will* have to bring") but nonetheless stops short of a frame extension that would cast low fertility as a threat to the entire population; in fact, one is unsure from such statements whether Vucic necessarily views the potential importation of foreign workers as an undesirable event (either for specific individuals or for the entire population).

The patriotic frame of low fertility

Patriotic concerns around low fertility are relatively common in both countries, with pronatalism being framed as essential to the survival of the nation.

During a parliamentary debate on the expansion of the policy in Serbia, Minister of Family Affairs Ratko Dmitrovic amplifies the patriotic frame by casting population decline as a core threat to the Serbian nation. By describing low fertility as "the problem that overshadows all other problems" and positing that Serbs are disappearing "at the speed of light" (SD2a.; February 2022), Dmitrovic provides a heightened representation of an otherwise real demographic trend. Finally, in this type of rhetoric, echoed also by Minister of Finance Sinisa Mali (SD2d.; February 2022), the undesirable character of the potential disappearance of the nation is portrayed as obvious, with no additional discursive effort being made to articulate why any individual representative of said nation should be concerned about these prospects.

The articulation of low fertility as a disproportionately grave threat to *his* nation is also expressed by Prime Minister Gruevski in North Macedonia. At the announcement of the policy, Gruevski amplifies the patriotic frame by contrasting North Macedonia's demographic trends to those in Western Europe:

"People are having fewer kids almost everywhere. But don't worry about the French and the Germans. They can always make up for it by getting more people from abroad, not least from our part of the world. Worry about our nation, which is losing people left and right." (MC1a.; February 2009)

Like Vucic, Gruevski does not specify why population decline, even if it is indeed more rapid in North Macedonia than in many other countries, should be considered problematic. Yet, by painting low fertility *and* national decline as worrisome trends, he sets the rhetorical stage for more evocative patriotic framing of low fertility in the aforementioned TV campaign "Family and Children Are Our Biggest Treasure" aired in 2009. An episode titled "Family Album" episode features an elderly gentleman sifting through a family album. He then points to pictures of his great-grandmother and admires her for "hav[ing] four children during Ottoman

times, when she took food out of her own mouth to feed her children." (MT1.) The episode links the declining size of the Macedonian nation to the "ideologically congruent yet structurally unconnected" (Snow et al. 1986, 147) topic of the experiences of Macedonians during the Ottoman occupation. Thus, it bridges low fertility, which may or may not be perceived as concerning by the audience, to a well-known historical injustice, presumably to create a mental connection between the former and the latter, which can be expected to be already inspiring a set of negative emotions in the audience.

The ethnic frame of low fertility

Ethnic concerns around low fertility are relatively common in Serbia yet completely absent in North Macedonia. We propose some potential reasons in the discussion section later.

Most of the Serbian rhetoric in our sample reveals an ethnic-based conception of the Serbian nation as synonymous with the largest (and homonymous) ethnic group in it. On one occasion, Minister Dmitrovic acknowledges this (otherwise usually implicit) conflation by saying that "with all due respect to other ethnicities, I will only be talking [in his parliamentary address] about [ethnic] Serbs, the biggest ethnic group in our country." (SC2b.; February 2018) President Vucic has also made an explicit effort to differentiate between patriotic and ethnic concerns around low fertility by arguing that population decline is not an ethnically neutral phenomenon:

"(…) Let's remember that most refugees in the history of the world have been and will be Muslim, and that would not be a problem for us [Serbs] if we were more open-minded, but history has shown us that we are not." (SC2a.; January 2022)

"(…) Look at Angela Merkel. There's a reason why she is the greatest statesperson in the world. If she waits for Germans to have more children, it will never happen. Instead, she has solved population aging by opening the door to foreigners. But our people, for reasons unknown to me, aren't ready [for Serbia] to do that" (SC2a.; January 2022)

By acknowledging the ethnic dimension to patriotic concerns, Vucic is bridgingthe two frames, while nonetheless stopping short from merging them fully into one. Vucic's patriotic framing is not corroborated by references to any *specific* downsides to a declining population. Her provides one potential such downside (the falling number of ethnic Serbs at the expense of other ethnicities within and (presumably especially) outside Serbia), but he also explicitly distances himself from it by attributing it to xenophobic attitudes among the population ["our people aren't ready"], rather than a personal ideological preference.

The moral frame of low fertility

Moral concerns around low fertility are relatively common in both countries. In North Macedonia, they are most prominent in the "Family and Children Are Our Biggest Treasure" media campaign, which amplifies the moral frame in several rather distinct ways. In an episode titled "Professional Woman with Four Children", a real-life female cardiologist recounts her experience of having four children. Her conclusion is that "no success is complete without children" (MT3.), casting child-bearing as a fundamental prerequisite for individual happiness. This instance of moral framing also contains an implicit bridge towards traditional gender norms, as the main character is female (and no similar episode exists with a male main character). Conveyed through the lens of a woman, the message might have been expected to resonate with the viewer better through the (unstated) assumption that women are (particularly) likely to derive a sense of fulfilment from parenthood, while being unlikely to derive it solely from their professional success. Another example is the episode "The Lives of Two Families", which follows the lives of two married couples and contrasts their childbearing decisions. While the first couple conceive their first child immediately after their wedding and go on to have another three children and multiple grandchildren, the second couple prioritise their professional careers, only to end up alone and miserable at old age (MT 2.). Once again, the message is that childbearing is a precondition for long-term happiness and a healthy relationship with one's partner.

In Serbia, too, the moral frame is constructed in several distinct ways, although bridging and extension are more common framing techniques than (mere) amplification. For instance, Member of Parliament Filipovic asks the following rhetorical questions: "If you have no children, who is going to take care of you when you are 50 or 60? Who is going to bring you your medication?" (SD2c.; February 2022), thus amplifying the moral frame by casting childbearing as a responsibility towards oneself. Moreover, an episode of the media campaign "Births Now" titled "The Things That Matter in Life" includes the following message:

"Let's think about our ancestors who had multiple children under much more dire circumstances: world wars, Balkan wars. They didn't live for the latest iPhone series or brand of shoes; they lived for the sound of a baby crying." (ST1.)

Here, the moral frame is bridged with the patriotic frame by using the childbearing preferences of past Serbian generations to foster a sense of guilt about childlessness among Serbs today. Different iterations of the depiction of childlessness as antithetical to a morally virtuous life can also be observed in another two episodes of the campaign (ST3; ST5).

Discussion and Conclusion

Our analysis of 26 pieces of discursive material in North Macedonia and 32 pieces of discursive material in Serbia has revealed four distinct (yet not necessarily mutually exclusive) frames of low fertility in Serbia and three in North Macedonia. The socioeconomic, patriotic, moral, and (in the case of Serbia) ethnic frames of low fertility were constructed through frame amplification, bridging, and extension (albeit not through frame transformation). Through all these frames, pronatalist policymakers sought to portray low fertility as an extraordinary problem calling for extraordinary policy solutions, thus (explicitly on some occasions and implicitly on others) providing discursive justification for the introduction, preservation, and (in the case of Serbia) expansion of pronatalist child benefits.

Across the four frames, we found sizeable evidence of three of the four framing techniques examined. Frame amplification was employed by policymakers in both countries, as the demographic reality of low fertility and associated concerns about it were often cast in a dramatic and heightened yet vague and empirically uncorroborated fashion ("all sorts of implications" (MC1a.); "losing people left and right" (MC1a.); "at the speed of light" (SD2a.)). Frame bridging was also relatively common, including between two of the four frames themselves (i.e., patriotic + ethnic, patriotic + moral). Patriotic concerns about pronatalism were often articulated in ethnocentric terms, as the future of the nation was (implicitly or explicitly) equated with the future of the majority ethnic group. At the same time, the alleged patriotic (collective) duty of ensuring the survival of the nation was often merged with the moral (individual) duty towards one's future self or towards a set of prescribed expectations of "the correct way of life" in a multi-layered portrayal of childbearing as a virtuous behaviour.

At times, the patriotic frame also contained a temporal bridge, such as in the multiple contrasts (e.g., MT1.; ST1.) between population decline in the present amidst relatively favourable national circumstances and demographic growth under difficult historical conditions in both countries. Finally, frame bridging also occurred between one of the four frames and an "ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frame" (Snow et al. 1986: 467) unrelated to the subject matter of childbearing. This was observed in the occasional reinforcement of the patriotic and moral frames (in separate instances, e.g., MT1 and MT3) through the (stated or unstated) appeal to traditional gender norms, possibly under the assumption that appealing to such presumably popular norms might make the pronatalist message resonate better with the audience.

We also found non-negligible evidence of frame extension, which is usually regarded in the literature as a less common framing technique (Snow &Benford 1986; Lindekinde 2014). Examples include the portrayal of socioeconomic concerns around low fertility as fatal to the entire economy (rather than posing potentially

manageable threats to specific aspects of it) (MD1a.) and the extension of moral concerns around low fertility to moral concerns around the alleged decline in marriage rates and emergence of a "liberal Marxist ideology" (SC1a.). We found no evidence of frame transformation, which means that the two more complex techniques as per the Frame Analysis method were either not used at all or used less (in the case of frame extension) compared to the two simpler techniques (frame amplification and bridging).

In terms of the content of the frames, we found more similarities than differences between the two countries. The cumulative results are outlined below in the appendices.

In both countries, the patriotic and moral frames emerged as the two most common frames. Within the patriotic frame, we found particularly strong similarities in the depiction of childbearing as a matter of historical duty towards past generations. Abundant similarities were also observed under the moral frame, albeit with one difference. While also present in Serbia ("Who is going to bring you your medications when you are 50 or 60"? SD2c.), the assertion of a moral duty towards *oneself* was more prevalent in North Macedonia ("no success is complete without children" (MT3.); "childbearing is about happiness, childbearing is about joy" (MC1a.), as opposed to the prevalence of a moral duty towards society and the national "way of life" in Serbia. Taken together, however, these two frames provide support to our theoretical expectation that pronatalist governments use their pronatalism as a tool for Renan's "daily plebiscite" (1992) and the ongoing redefinition of national identity. However, contrary to our theoretical expectations given the multi-ethnic character of both societies and their relatively fraught interethnic relations, the ethnic frame was only observed in Serbia.

The prevalence of the patriotic and moral frame over the socioeconomic frame in both countries also confirms our expectation that pronatalism in North Macedonia and Serbia is more rooted in identity politics than in demographic realities. This finding is at the same time consistent with the notion of a two-dimensional ideological axis in the contemporary politics of developed countries, as the patriotic and moral frames coexist with the (less salient yet present in both countries) socioeconomic frame, indicating that Macedonian and Serbian policymakers have adopted a multi-layered framing of pronatalism. In any case, the observed dominance of (conservative) identity-based frames also fits the slightly broader notions of "re-traditionalisation" and "re-familialisation" that have marked the evolution of family discourse *and* policy in (most of) the Balkans and Eastern Europe since the collapse of socialism (Hantrains 2004; Javornik 2016; Simic&Simic 2019; Stone 2020), with policy provisions either being cut altogether or focused on tools such as long maternity leave with little regard for gender equality. As demonstrated also by this study, these paradigms have manifested themselves discursively through an

increasing focus on individual (sometimes instead of – rather than alongside – systemic) responsibility for demographic trends, and by extension, for the (allegedly uncertain) survival of the nation.

In terms of potential explanations for our results, we propose some 'push' *and* 'pull' factors for the main similarity in the results between the two countries: the dominance of the patriotic and moral frames. Of the 'pull' factors, patriotism and conservative values play a strong role in North Macedonia and Serbia, both of which have some of the highest rates of self-declared religious and patriotic attachment in Europe. As of 2015 (Pew Research Centre 2018), 72% of Serbs and 88% of Macedonians declared themselves to be religious (compared to a world average of 63%), while 65% of Serbs and 57% of Macedonians (compared to a world average of 49%) viewed their respective countries as superior to others as of 2017 (ibid). 'Pull' explanations of discursive strategies are common in the literature, as said strategies are assumed to be effective only when they mobilise "political symbols ever-present in the shared ideological repertoires, [i.e.] a relatively coherent set of cultural beliefs, [that are] available in their society" (Beland 2005). In family policy specifically, the progressive shift in citizens' attitudes towards gender equality regarding childcare has been linked with policy change in Germany and Japan (Morgan 2013; Fleckenstein & Lee 2014; Blome 2016); the lack of such a shift, on the other hand, has been cited as one of the reasons for Italy's enduring familialist policy regime (Leon et al. 2021).

Of the 'push' factors, both VMRO-DPMNE and SNS (both during the periods of interest and today) are conservative parties whose ideological appeal has consistently been rooted in patriotism and (to a somewhat lesser extent) Christianity in countries with highly contested nation-building processes. At the European level, both parties are members of the centre-right European People's Party (EPP). SNS leader, President Aleksandar Vucic, was Minister of Information in Slobodan Milosevic's disgraced wartime government in the 1990s and has built his political persona as a defender of the Serbian nation (Jovanovic 2018; Vulovic 2022). VMRO-DPMNE has developed a similarly nation-saving brand over the years with strong patriotic imagery (Gjuzelov&Hadjievska 2020; Vangelov 2019), not least through its name, as VMRO stands for the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (*Vnatresna Makedonska Revolucionerna Organizacija*), an anti-Ottoman paramilitary unit from the late 19th and early 20th century.

The main difference in the results, i.e., the embrace of the ethnic frame in Serbia and the complete lack thereof in North Macedonia, has confirmed our expectation about the importance of party competition, as the former might have been influenced by the lack of a prominent ethnic-minority coalition partner and the pressure from a far-right challenger (Dveri), while the latter might have been affected by the need to preserve a complex interethnic governing coalition. The absence of an

ethnic frame of low fertility observed in VMRO-DPMNE's rhetoric can also be seen as partly supportive of Jan Rovny's (2004) seminal thesis on the effects of ethnicity on party competition in post-socialist Eastern Europe. Rovny found that the presence of a sizeable ethnic minority was associated with more progressive politics (although usually in the form of electoral losses for – rather than ideological moderation of – centre-right parties). In our case, the progressive outcome relates to VMRO-DPMNE's avoidance of ethnic-based rhetoric and its choice not to instrumentalise the significant discrepancies in the fertility rate of ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians – a common discursive focus of SNS in Serbia.

It is also important to highlight that the absence of an ethnic framing of low fertility in North Macedonia's government discourse does not necessarily mean pronatalism was never articulated in ethnic terms in the broader public discourse. The media space in both countries in this study has been characterised as highly politicised during the period of interest (Pjesivac et al. 2016; Jovanovic 2018), with the two ruling parties controlling or at least partly influencing most major media outlets. It is therefore conceivable that the media played an important role in the overall articulation of the pronatalist message intended by these governments. In terms of the ethnic framing, government-friendly media might have the undertaken the role of amplifiers of the existing ethnic framing in the government discourse in Serbia. In North Macedonia, their role might have been one of conduits, as prominent journalists close to the government might have (ab)used their putatively impartial position to articulate ethnically charged narratives on behalf of the government that would be politically costly if emanated by said government directly (Stojarova 2019). The broader implication here is that a more explicit consideration of the role of media (especially in countries with curtailed media freedoms) in future analyses of pronatalist discourses might lead to somewhat different findings. Other relevant actors of interest might be churches and conservative non-governmental organisations, who have emerged as important pronatalist advocates in (other parts of) Eastern Europe (Dobrotic et al. 2013; Shiffman et al. 2002).

We end by acknowledging several limitations to our research and proposing some further avenues of inquiry. First, our study was limited to the communicative discourse around pronatalism. We encourage future studies of the *coordinative* discourse between all political and policy actors before the introduction of pronatalist policy, especially in countries with stronger party competition and more meaningful political contestation of pronatalism than North Macedonia and Serbia. Second, our analytical focus on the framing of low fertility as a policy problem, rather than pronatalism as a policy response, even though the two were sometimes overlapping in our data sample, prevented us from considering any potential government rhetoric on the policy implications of pronatalist child benefits *beyond* pronatalism, for instance in areas such as gender equality and child poverty. Third, while our case

selection was largely determined by our research focus, it was also shaped by our language skills, which prevented us from including other notable country cases of pronatalist discourse and policy.

We thus invite further research on this topic, especially in countries where the discursive frames around low fertility analysed in this research might manifest themselves differently or be replaced by different frames altogether. For instance, in countries with high immigration and negative citizen attitudes towards immigration, the ethnic frame might be expected to take a much larger shape. Moreover, the implications of party competition for pronatalist discourses might be very different in countries with a narrower power gap between the ruling party and its challengers. In fact, such challengers might sometimes (albeit probably rarely) emerge also from the "left" of the political spectrum, as pronatalist policy in Poland, for instance, is also endorsed by the main (progressive) opposition party (Hrytsai 2021). Finally, we hope that our research might prove useful to area studies scholars of North Macedonia and Serbia, as some of our findings might (indirectly) shed light on the broader discursive strategies of self-legitimation adopted by conservative ruling parties in these countries.

Appendix: Data Sample and overview of frames of low fertility in North Macedonia and Serbia

Table 1: Data Sample

North Macedonia			Serbia		
Parliamentary debates (app. total duration: 3h)	Press conferences (app. total duration: 1h)	TV campaign (app. total duration: 1.5h)	Parliamentary debates (app. total duration: 3h)	Press conferences (app. total duration: 2h)	TV campaign (app. total duration: 1h)
MD1. First debate on the support introduction (April 13, 2009): *MD1a. Member of Parliament Silvana Boneva (x2) *MD1b. Member of Parliament Vlatko Gjorchev *MD1c. Member of Parliament Ilija Dimovski (x2) MD2. Second debate on the support introduction (April 17, 2009): *MD2a. Member of Parliament MarjancoKolevski (x2) *MD2b. Member of Parliament Nikola Kotevski (x3)	MC 1. Announcement of the support (February 24, 2009): *MC1a. Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski (x3) *MC1b. Member of Parliament Vlatko Gjorchev (x2) *MC1c. Member of Parliament Ilija Dimovski (x2)	MT1. "Family Album" MT2. "The Lives of Two Families" MT3. "Professional Woman with Four Children" MT4. "Young Mother" MT5. "Empty Schools" MT6. "Parents with Five Kids" MT7. "Springflower" MT8. "Beethoven Was Not Aborted" MT9. "Abortion in Hospital" (Note: All episodes were released jointly in May 2009 and were broadcast sporadically over several months on national TV channels)	SD1. Debate on the first support iteration 06-2/68-7 (March 22, 2018): *SD1a. Member of Parliament SrbislavFilipovic (x2) *SD1b. Member of Parliament Nebojsa Bakarec (x2) SD2. Debate on the second support iteration (February 23, 2022): *SD2a. Family Minister Ratko Dmitrovic (guest appearance; x3) *SD2b. President Aleksandar Vucic (guest appearance; x2) *SD2c. Member of Parliament SrbislavFilipovic (x2) *SD2d. Minister of Finance Sinisa Mali (guest appearance; x2) *SD2e. Member of Parliament Samir Tandir (x2)	SC1. Announcement of the first support iteration (February 14, 2018): *SC1a. President Aleksandar Vucic (x3) *SC1b. Family Minister Ratko Dmitrovic (x2) SC2. Announcement of the second support iteration (January 11, 2022): *SC2a. President Aleksandar Vucic (x2) *SC2b. Family Minister Ratko Dmitrovic (x2) *SC2c. Prime Minister Ana Brnabic (x2)	ST1. "The Things That Matter in Life" ST2. "Mom, I Want a Brother" ST3. "Shush, The Baby Is Crying" ST4. "Investment in the Future" ST5. "The Serbian Tree of Life" ST6. "When I'm Gone" (Note: All episodes were released jointly in April 2018 and were broadcast sporadically over several months on national TV channels)

Legend:
MD = North Macedonia – Parliamentary Debate
MC = North Macedonia – Press Conference
MT = North Macedonia – TV Campaign
SD = Serbia – Parliamentary Debate
SC = Serbia – Press Conference
ST = Serbia – TV Campaign
(x1); (x2); (x3) = the number of times the discursive actor spoke on the respective occasion (e.g. x3 = a Member of Parliament spoke for three non-consecutive times during the respective parliamentary debate)

Table 2: Overview of the four frames of low fertility in North Macedonia

Type of discursive actor	Country	Number of discursive pieces	Number of frame references	Socio-economic	Patriotic	Ethnic	Moral
Executive government	Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski	**3**	**4**	**2**	**1**	**0**	**1**
Legislative government	Member of Parliament Silvana Boneva	2	2	2	0	0	0
	Member of Parliament Vlatko Gjorchev	3	4	1	2	0	1
	Member of Parliament Ilija Dimovski	4	5	0	2	0	3
	Member of Parliament MarjancoKolevski	2	3	0	2	0	1
	Member of Parliament Nikola Kotevski	3	3	0	2	0	1
Legislative government (TOTAL)		**14**	**17**	**3**	**8**	**0**	**6**
Ruling party as a whole (TV campaigns)	N/A	**9**	**12**	**4**	**4**	**0**	**4**
TOTAL		**26**	**33**	**9**	**13**	**0**	**11**

Table 3: Overview of the four frames of low fertility in Serbia

Type of discursive actor	Country	Number of discursive pieces	Number of frame references	Socio-economic	Patriotic	Ethnic	Moral
Executive government	President Aleksandar Vucic	7	9	2	2	3	2
	Prime Minister Ana Brnabic	2	3	0	1	1	1
	Minister of Family Affairs Ratko Dmitrovic	7	10	2	3	3	2
	Minister of Finance Sinisa Mali	2	3	1	0	1	1
Executive government (TOTAL)	**18**		**25**	**5**	**5**	**5**	**6**
Legislative government	Member of Parliament SrbislavFilipovic	4	7	2	2	1	2
	Member of Parliament Nebojsa Bakarec	2	2	0	1	0	1
	Member of Parliament Samir Tandir	2	3	0	1	2	0
Legislative government (TOTAL)	**8**		**12**	**2**	**4**	**3**	**3**
Ruling party as a whole (TV campaigns)	N/A	**6**	**10**	**2**	**3**	**1**	**4**
TOTAL		**32**	**47**	**9**	**13**	**12**	**13**

References:

Alesina, A., Reich, B. (2015). "Nation-building". Working paper, Department of Economics, Harvard University.

Anser, M. K., Yousaf, Z., Khan, M. A., Xuan HinhVoo, Nassani, A. A., Alotaibi, S. M., Zaman, K. (2020). The impacts of COVID-19 measures on global environment and fertility rate: Double coincidence. Air Quality Atmosphere and Health, 13(9), 1083-1092.

Armitage, A. (2021). From demographic security to demographic resilience: Towards an anthropology of multilateral policymaking in eastern Europe. Ph.D. thesis, Geneva Graduate Institute.

Breyer, F., Costa-Font, J., & Felder, S. (2010). Ageing, health, and health care. Oxford Review of Economic Policy, 26(4), 674-690. doi:10.1093/oxrep/grq032

Bruno,D., Sorando,R., A´lvarez-Farizo,B.,Castellano,C.,Ce´spedes,V.,Gallardo ,B., Jime´nez, J. J., L´opez, M. V., L´opez-Flores, R., Moret-Fern´andez, D., Navarro, E., Picazo, F., Sevilla-Callejo, M., Tormo, J., Vidal-Macua, J. J., Nicolau, J. M., and Com´ın, F. A. (2021). "Depopulation impacts on ecosystem services in Mediterranean rural areas. Ecosystem Services", 52.

Beland, D. (2005) 'Ideas and Social Policy: An Institutionalist Perspective', Social Policy & Administration, 39(1), pp. 1–18. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9515.2005.00421.

Calasanti, T. (2020). Brown Slime, the Silver Tsunami, and apocalyptic demography: The importance of ageism and age relations. Social Currents, 7(3), 195–211.

Canzler, W. (2008). Transport infrastructure in shrinking (East) Germany. German Politics & Society, 26(2), 76–92. https://doi.org/10.3167/gps.2008.260205

Cox, R. H. (2001). "The social construction of an imperative: why welfare reform happened in Denmark and the Netherlands but not in Germany", World Politics, 53: 463-98

Deutsch, K., Foltz, W. (2010) Nation Building in Comparative Contexts. Aldine Transaction.

Ekman, M. (2022). The great replacement: Strategic mainstreaming of far-right conspiracy claims. Convergence, 28(4), 1127-1143.

Fleckenstein, T., MohunHimmelweit, S. (2022). "The Politics of Ideas in Family Policy: Parties, Electoral Competition, and Shifting Norms". Oxford Handbook of Family Policy Over the Life Course.

Gauthier, A. (1996). The State and the Family: A Comparative Analysis of Family Policies in Industrialized Countries. Clarendon Press Oxford.

Ghodsee, K. (2018). "Why Women Have Better Sex Under Socialism" Pennsylvania: Vintage Books.

Gietel-Basten, S. (2023). "Depopulation or population decline? Demographic nightmares and imaginaries". Vienna Yearbook of Population Research 2023, 21.

Gjuzelov, B., &Hadjievska, M. I. (2020). Institutional and symbolic aspects of illiberal politics: The case of North Macedonia (2006-2017). Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, 20(1), 41-60. doi:10.1080/14683857.2019.1672941

Goffman, E. (1974). Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

Gordy, E. (2013). Guilt, responsibility, and denial: The past at stake in post-Milosevic Serbia. Pennyslvania: Pennsylvania Studies in Human Rights.

Hantrais, L. (2004). Family policy matters: responding to family change in Europe. Bristol: The Policy Press.

Hrystai, L. (2021). "Evaluation of the Family 500+ Programme: National and International Perspectives". Politologia, 28(2).

Hummel, D., Lux, A. (2007). "Population decline and infrastructure: The case of the German water supply system." Vienna Yearbook of Population Research, 5, 167–191. https://doi.org/10.1553/populationyearbook2007s167

Javornik, J. (2016). Maternal employment in Post-Socialist Countries: Understanding the Implications of Childcare Policies in T. Roosalu& D. Hofacker (Eds), Rethinking Gender, Work and Care in a New Europe: theorizing Markets and Societies in the Post-Postsocialist Era, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan (pp. 189-214).

Jovanovic, S. M. (2019). Confronting recent history: Media in Serbia during Aleksandar Vucic's Ministry of Information in the Milosevic era (1998-1999). Hiperboreea, 6(1), 61-74.

Kitschelt, H. P., & Rehm, P. (a). Polarity reversal: The socioeconomic reconfiguration of partisan support in knowledge societies. Politics & Society, doi:10.1177/00323292221100220

Lee, R. D. & Mason, A. (2012). "Population aging and the generational economy: A global Perspective". Edward Elgar.

Lee, R., Mason, A. & members of the NTA Network. (2014). "Is low fertility really a problem? Population aging, dependency, and consumption". Science, 346(6206), 229–234.

Lindekilde, L. (2014). "Discourse and Frame Analysis: In-Depth Analysis of Qualitative Data in Social Movement Research." In D. della Porta, Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research, Oxford University Press, 195-227.

Lipp, B., and Peine, A. (2022). Ageing as a driver of progressive politics? What the European Silver Economy teaches us about the co-constitution of ageing and innovation. Ageing & Society.

Lutz, W. (2022). "National Human Development Report – Serbia 2022. Human Development in Response to Demographic Change." United Nations Development Programme.

Merdjanova, I. (2000). "In Search of Identity: Nationalism and Religion in Eastern Europe", Religion, State and Society, 28:3, 233-262, DOI: 10.1080/713694765

Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2019). Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/9781108595841

Obaidi, M., Kunst, J., Ozer, S., &Kimel, S. Y. (2022). The "Great Replacement" conspiracy: How the perceived ousting of Whites can evoke violent extremism and Islamophobia. Group Processes & Intergroup Relations, 25(7), 1675-1695.

Pavlovic, D. (2020). The political economy behind the gradual demise of democratic institutions in Serbia. Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, 20(1), 19-39. doi:10.1080/14683857.2019.1672929

Pendleton, B.F. An historical description and analysis of pronatalist policies in Italy, Germany, and Sweden. Policy Sci 9, 45–70 (1978). https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00137978

Petreski, M. (2021). How migration, human capital and the labour market interact in North Macedonia. European Training Foundation.

Pew Research Center. (2018). "Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe."

Pickup M, de Rooij EA, van der Linden C, Goodwin MJ. (2021). Brexit, COVID-19, and attitudes toward immigration in Britain. Soc Sci Q. 102(5):2184-2193.

Pierson, P. (2000). Increasing returns, path dependence, and the study of politics. American Political Science Review, 94(2), 251-267

Pjesivac, I., Spasovska, K., &Imre, I. (2016). The truth between the lines: Conceptualization of trust in news media in Serbia, Macedonia, and Croatia. Mass Communication and Society, 19(3), 323-351. doi:10.1080/15205436.2015.1128548

Renan, E. (1992). "What is a Nation?", text of a conference delivered at the Sorbonne on March 11th, 1882, in Ernest Renan, Qu'est-cequ'unenation? Paris, Presses-Pocket.

Schmidt, V. A. (2008). Discursive institutionalism: The explanatory power of ideas and discourse. Annual Review of Political Science, 11, 303-326. doi: 10.1146/annurev.polisci.11.060606.135342

Schwander, H. (2018) "Electoral Demand, Party Competition, and Family Policy: The Politics of a New Policy Field" in P. Manow (ed.) Welfare Democracies and Party Politics: Explaining Electoral Dynamics in Times of Changing Welfare Capitalism, 197-224, Oxford University Press.

Seeleib-Kaiser, M., &Toivonen, T. (2011). Between reforms and birth rates: Germany, Japan, and family policy discourse. Social Politics, 18(3), 331-360. doi:10.1093/sp/jxr016

Shiffman, J., Skrabalo, M., &Subotic, J. (2002). Reproductive rights and the state in Serbia and Croatia. Social Science & Medicine, 54(4), 625-642. doi:10.1016/S0277-9536(01)00134-4

Sides, J., Tesler, M., &Vavreck, L. (2017). Donald Trump and the Rise of White Identity Politics. Proceedings of the 2016 US Presidential Election: Tumult at Home, Retreat Abroad, 1-36.

Signes-Pont, M. T., Cort´es-Plana, J. J., Boters-Pitarch, J., and Mora-Mora, H. (2022). "Cultural heritage and sustainable rural development: The case of T`arbena, Spain." Heritage Review, 5(4), 3010–3031. https://doi.org/10.3390/heritage5040156

Simić, M., &Simić, I. (2019). Who Should Care About Our Children? Public Childcare Policy in Yugoslav Socialism and its Serbian Aftermath. Journal of Family History, 44(2), 145–158.

Snow, D., Benford, R. (1988). "Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization," in Bert Klandermans, HanspeterKriesi, and Sidney Tarrow (eds), From Structure to Action: Comparing Social Movement Research Across Cultures. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, pp. 197–217.

Snow, D., Rochford, E., Benford, R. (1986) "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation," American Sociological Review 51(4): 464–81.

Stojarova, V. (2020). Media in the Western Balkans: Who controls the past controls the future. Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, 20(1), 161-181. doi:10.1080/14683857.2020.1702620

Suli, T. (2022). "Pathways to Parenthood in a Low Fertility Context: A Grounded Theory Study of Childbearing Trajectories Among Couples in The Republic of Serbia." Doctoral Dissertation, University of Oxford.

Szalma, I., Haskova, H., Olah, L., & Takacs, J. (2022). Fragile pronatalism and reproductive futures in European post-socialist contexts. Social Inclusion, 10(3), 82-86. doi:10.17645/si. v10i3.6128

Taylor, C. (2002). Modern social imaginaries. Public Culture, 14(1), 91–124.

Tepe, M., Vanhuysse, P. (2010). "Elderly bias, new social risks, and social spending: change and age in eight programmes across four worlds of welfare, 1980-2003". Journal of European Social Policy, 20(3): 217-34.

Toft, M. (2021). "Chapter 7: Wombfare: the weaponization of fertility." In J. Scubba (ed). A Research Agenda for Political Demography. Elgar Online.

Togman, R. (2019). "Nationalizing Sex: Fertility, Fear, and Power". Oxford University Press.

Trimble, R. (2013). The threat of 'Demographic Winter': A transnational politics of motherhood and endangered populations in pro-family documentaries. Feminist Formations, 25(2), 30–54. https://doi.org/10.1353/ff.2013.0028

Ullah, M. A., Moin, A. T., Araf, Y., Bhuiyan, A. R., Griffiths, M. D., &Gozal, D. (2020). Potential effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on future birth rate. Frontiers in Public Health, 8, 578438. doi:10.3389/fpubh.2020.578438

United Nations (2021). "World Population Policies 2019: Highlights." Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division.

Van Dijk, T. (2006). Discourse and manipulation: Theoretical discussion and some applications. RevistaSignos, 39(60), 49-74. doi:10.4067/S0718-09342006000100003

Vangelov, O. (2019). The primordialisation of ethnic nationalism in Macedonia. Europe-Asia Studies, 71(2), 203-224. doi:10.1080/09668136.2018.1562043

Varsa, E., Szikra, D. (2020). 'New eugenics,' gender and sexuality: a global perspective on reproductive politics and sex education in Cold War Europe, The History of the Family.

Vulovic, M. (2020). Performing statehood in Northern Kosovo: Discursive struggle over contested space. Cooperation and Conflict, 55(3), 326-346. doi:10.1177/0010836720906851