

THE PATTERN OF RELIGIOUS MARRIAGE AND TRANSITION TO CIVIL MARRIAGE IN TÜRKİYE: EVIDENCE FROM TÜRKİYE DEMOGRAPHIC AND HEALTH SURVEYS BASED ON MARRIAGE COHORTS

TÜRKİYE'DE DİNİ NİKAH ÖRÜNTÜSÜ VE RESMİ NİKAHA GEÇİŞ: TÜRKİYE NÜFUS VE SAĞLIK ARAŞTIRMALARINDAN ELDE EDİLEN EVLİLİK KUŞAKLARINA DAYALI KANITLAR

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the transition from religious to civil marriage in Türkiye, focusing on generational shifts in marriage practices. Using pooled data from the Türkiye Demographic and Health Surveys (TDHS) conducted between 1998 and 2018, the study employs life table analysis to explore the timing and likelihood of these transitions across different marriage cohorts. The findings reveal a consistent decline in the median transition time from religious to civil marriage over generations, with more recent cohorts transitioning more rapidly. Additionally, the study highlights the influence of socioeconomic factors, showing that women from poorer households, those whose mother tongue is Kurdish, and those with lower education levels are more likely to remain in religious-only marriages for longer periods. These patterns reflect broader transformation processes of marriages in Türkiye, where hybrid models blending traditional and modern elements are increasingly prevalent. By situating these trends within the hybrid model and forerunners theory, this research provides a nuanced understanding of the interaction with tradition in shaping marriage practices. The findings underscore the need for targeted policies to address socioeconomic and regional

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disparities, ensuring equitable access to the legal and social protections associated with civil marriage.

KEYWORDS: Religious Ceremony, Religious Marriage, Civil Ceremony, Marriage Cohorts, Marriage Ceremony

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Türkiye’de dini nikahtan resmi nikaha geçiş incelemekte ve evliliklerdeki kuşaksal değişimlere odaklanılmaktadır. 1998 ile 2018 yılları arasında yürütülen Türkiye Nüfus ve Sağlık Araştırmalarından (TNSA) toplanan verileri kullanarak, çalışma farklı evlilik kuşaklarında bu geçişlerin zamanlamasını ve olasılığını keşfetmek için yaşam tablosu analizini kullanmaktadır. Bulgular, nesiller boyunca dini nikahtan resmi nikaha geçişin ortanca süresinde tutarlı bir düşüş olduğunu ve daha genç kuşakların daha hızlı geçiş yaptığını ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca, çalışma sosyoekonomik faktörlerin etkisini vurgulayarak, daha yoksul hanelerde yaşayan kadınların, ana dili Kürtçe olanların ve daha düşük eğitim düzeyine sahip olanların yalnızca dini nikahla daha uzun süre evli kaldıklarını göstermektedir. Bu bulgular, geleneksel ve modern unsurları harmanlayan melez modellerin giderek yaygınlaştığı yaklaşımla Türkiye’deki evliliklerin daha geniş çaplı dönüşüm süreçlerini yansıtmaktadır. Bu bulguları melez model ve öncüler teorisine yerleştiren bu çalışma, evlilik pratiklerini şekillendirmede gelenekle etkileşime dair ayrıntılı bir anlayış sağlamaktadır. Bulgular, sosyoekonomik ve bölgesel eşitsizlikleri ele almak, resmi nikahla ilişkili yasal ve sosyal haklara eşit erişimi sağlamak için hedefli politikalara olan ihtiyacı vurgulamaktadır.

ANAHTAR SÖZCÜKLER: Dini Nikah, İmam Nikahı, Resmi Nikah, Evlilik Kuşakları, Evlilik Töreni

INTRODUCTION

The institution of marriage, although it has taken different forms in developed societies, is among the social institutions that have continued to be prevalent in a resilient manner throughout the world. In many societies, there is a direct connection between the beginning of marriage and the establishment of the family. Marriage often functions as the cornerstone of family life, shaping not only personal relationships but also broader social and economic systems. In this sense, the change in the prevalence, timing, form of establishment, and continuity of marriage has a significant impact on the establishment and dissolution of the family, and therefore on family structures. Understanding these dynamics is essential for comprehending broader demographic, social, and economic transitions.

It is anticipated that significant changes will occur in the timing of marriage and fertility, as well as in the establishment and continuity of the family, in the modernization process that all societies experience, albeit at different times (Goode 1963, van de Kaa 1987, Lesthaeghe 1992). In this process, the age at first marriage is increasing, traditional practices regarding the establishment of marriage are decreasing, different cohabitation experiences are emerging, an increase is observed in the end of marriages with divorce, and new forms of unions, such as consensual unions or same-sex partnerships, are becoming more visible in certain contexts. Parallel to these developments, the age at first birth is increasing, the period during which women remain in the fertile period decreases, and the level of fertility decreases. Finally, depending on the timing and pattern of marriage and fertility, a transition is observed in family structures from extended families to nuclear families (Lesthaeghe, 2014). These trends, collectively termed the “Second Demographic Transition,” highlight the interplay of cultural, economic, and institutional factors in reshaping family life.

It is possible to observe this transformation experienced by the institution of marriage through the changes experienced in the prevalence, timing, traditional practices regarding the establishment of marriage, and its continuity in Türkiye. In the last 10 years in Türkiye, the crude marriage rate (number of marriages per 1,000 people) decreased from 7.9 per thousand in 2013 to 6.6 per thousand in 2023, while the crude divorce rate (number of divorces per 1,000 people) increased from 1.6 per thousand in 2013 to 2 per thousand in 2023 (TurkStat 2024a). While the average age at first marriage among women was 22.7 in 2001, it reached an average of 25.7 in 2023 (TurkStat 2024a), and the fertility rate decreased rapidly and fell below replacement level (TurkStat 2024c). These changes align with global patterns observed in many middle-income countries transitioning through demographic and societal modernization. Despite these developments, when compared to OECD countries, it is seen that Türkiye is still among the countries where marriages are common, and divorces are rare (OECD 2022). For example, in many Western European countries, crude divorce rates exceed 3 per thousand, and the proportion of unmarried cohabiting couples continues to grow (Sánchez Gassen and Perelli-Harris, 2015; Eurostat, 2023). In 2023, it was observed that 59 percent of women aged 15-49 were still married in Türkiye, and only 6 percent were divorced, or their spouses had died (TurkStat, 2024b). While traditional practices such as marriages involving a bride price, arranged marriages, and consanguineous marriages persist in certain regions and social groups, they have significantly declined over time. According to the 2021 Türkiye Family Structure Survey (TFSS) results, the prevalence of arranged marriages without consent is lower among younger age groups, standing at approximately 4% (TurkStat, 2022). In this sense, it can be said

that the institution of marriage in Türkiye is still a strong social institution and a process experienced throughout life. However, questions remain about the intersection of modern and traditional practices and how they coexist or conflict during this transformative period.

Although the civil code has ruled that the religious marriage performed before the civil marriage is not valid, it is seen that the religious marriage, which is socially accepted in Türkiye, still has an important place in the establishment of marriages. This duality reflects the tension between secular legal frameworks and deeply rooted cultural practices. Despite being a traditional marriage practice, the religious marriage continues to be performed together with the civil marriage. The resilience of religious marriage practices offers a lens to explore broader cultural continuities and adaptations in the context of modernization. However, studies on this sociodemographic phenomenon, which is considered specific to Türkiye, are quite limited. The first study examining the prevalence of religious marriage according to marriage generations was conducted by Civelek and Koç (2007). In some other studies, religious marriage has often been considered as a variable when analyzing demographic research without making a distinction between marriage generations (Koç and Koç 1998, Koç 2004, Tezcan and Coşkun 2004, Yüksel Kaptanoğlu et al. 2012). Apart from these, there are studies that reveal different implementations of religious marriage (Türkan and Atahan 2017) and the contribution of religious marriage to the maintenance of patriarchal gender relations (İlkkaracan and İlkkaracan 1998, İlkkaracan, 2001). These contributions underscore the need for more comprehensive analyses that account for generational, regional, and socioeconomic variations in religious marriage practices.

This study aims to explore the evolving dynamics of religious and civil marriage practices in Türkiye through three interrelated objectives. First, it examines how the prevalence of religious marriages has changed over time and across marriage cohorts. Second, it investigates the timing of transitions from religious to civil marriages, highlighting generational differences. Finally, it identifies the socio-demographic subpopulations that drive or resist these changes, focusing on factors such as education, wealth, urban-rural divides, and linguistic backgrounds. These objectives collectively provide a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between tradition and modernity in shaping Türkiye's marriage practices.

LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The establishment of marriage in Türkiye, and the rights and obligations of spouses, are determined according to the Turkish Civil Code adopted in 1926. In this code, the legal age of marriage was set as 18 for men and 17 for women

(Turkish Civil Code 1926). In 1938, due to policies aimed at increasing fertility, the age of marriage was lowered to 15 for women and 17 for men (Official Gazette of the Republic of Türkiye, 1938). The Turkish Civil Code establishes the age of majority as 18, while the minimum age for marriage is set at 17 for both men and women. Since the age of majority is defined as 18, minors under this age require the consent of their legal representative to marry. In other words, individuals can marry independently at 18, but those who are 17 need permission to do so (Turkish Civil Code 2001). Also in specific cases, with family permission and court approval in accordance with Article 124 of the Civil Code, can men and women marry at the age of 16 (Turkish Civil Code 2001). Although the age of majority aligns with global discussions on the importance of regulating marriage age to prevent child and early marriages, legal loopholes allow exceptions to become patterns.

The Turkish Civil Code states that the religious ceremony of marriage cannot be performed without showing the family certificate and the validity of the marriage does not depend on the religious ceremony being performed (Turkish Civil Code 2001). Although religious ceremony does not have any legal validity in Türkiye, it is quite common for couples to practice it together with civil ceremony. However, certain groups in Türkiye still marry exclusively through religious ceremonies, thereby forfeiting the legal rights and protections associated with civil marriage. The most recent amendment was made to Article 22 of the Population Services Law No. 5490 in 2017, granting provincial and district muftis the authority to perform civil marriages (Official Gazette of the Republic of Türkiye, 2017). This change sparked debates about the potential implications for secularism and the separation of religion and state, reflecting ongoing tensions in Turkish society regarding the role of religious institutions in civic life.

Demographic trends in Türkiye reflect a unique intersection of modern European and traditional Islamic values, with increasing age at first marriage, declining marriage rates, and slightly rising divorce rates, alongside persistent low tolerance for cohabitation, shaped by culturally conservative and neo-liberal policies (Engin, Hürman, & Harvey, 2020). On the other hand, studies on religious marriage in Türkiye are limited. Research on marriage processes primarily focuses on age at first marriage, marriage and fertility (Kırdar et al., 2018; Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu & Ergöçmen, 2014), changes in divorce rates, family structure, and gender roles within families (Caarls and de Valk, 2018; Acar, 2022; Cinar and Köse, 2018). In parallel with the sociodemographic heterogeneity in Türkiye, ethnicity-based findings come to the fore in marriage studies. Ertem and Koçtürk (2008) highlighted the persistence of patriarchal family structures and marriage-specific traditions, such as cradle-marriage and cousin marriage, in Diyarbakır. The study found that these traditions often delay or hinder women's education and personal

development and are observed in poorer, less educated households. Hosseini and Erfani (2014) demonstrate that Kurds in Iran exhibit considerable resistance to modernization factors that promote uniform cultural norms regarding marriage. Additionally, studies by Koç, Hancıoğlu, and Çavlin (2008) and Gündüz-Hoşgör and Smits (2002) point to the role of ethnic endogamy among Kurds, which reflects strong traditional influences and resistance to modernization, further supporting the slower transition observed in this group.

Hosseini and Erfani (2014) also demonstrated that education plays a pivotal role in shaping attitudes towards consanguineous marriage, suggesting that it is a key modernization factor. Furthermore, Acar (2022) emphasised the importance of education on family formation and age at marriage of women. Kavas and Thornton (2020) discussed how exposure to Western values through education and urbanization drives shifts toward modern family practices, such as self-choice marriages, while traditional norms persist in varying degrees. Together, these studies provide robust evidence that socioeconomic and cultural characteristics significantly shape marriage behaviors, supporting the patterns identified in this study.

In their pioneering study, Civelek and Koç (2007) examined religious marriage prevalence, transitions from religious marriage to civil marriage, and average transition times across marriage cohorts using the 2003 Türkiye Demographic and Health Survey (TDHS) dataset. The results indicated that women whose mother tongue is Kurdish, living in eastern provinces, with low household welfare, no formal education, and lacking employment with social security, were less likely to transition from religious to civil marriage. Keskin et al.'s (2021) study on transitions to civil marriage using the 1993-2013 TDHS dataset also showed that recent cohorts' transition to civil marriage more quickly, and revealed that education, age at first marriage and place of residence are the main determinants of resistance to transition to civil marriage.

According to Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu et al. (2015), the practices of arranged marriages, religious-only marriages, and consanguineous marriages are all decreasing, while women at high risk of marriage tend to adopt or are compelled to accept more traditional characteristics in the establishment of their unions. This high risk is also related to the increased prevalence of child marriages. Ergöçmen et al. (2020) showed that in the order of civil and religious marriage ceremonies, religious marriage always took place first in marriages before the age of 18. According to the 2018-TNSA, 64% of women married before the age of 18 had a religious marriage ceremony first, while 7% had only a religious marriage ceremony. Therefore, in the 20-24 age group, 71% of marriages before the age of 18 were preceded by a religious marriage.

Traditional practices in the formation of marriages were correlated with early marriages as well as early mortality (Hancıoğlu and Ergöçmen 1992).

Tezcan and Coşkun (2004) analysed changes in age at first marriage and divorce rates in Türkiye using data from the 1978 Türkiye Fertility Survey and the 2003 TDHS. They found that women with lower education, residing in rural areas, entering marriage at younger ages, or in consanguineous unions were more likely to marry through religious ceremonies alone. Similar findings were noted in İlkkaracan's (1998) study, which analysed data from 599 women in Eastern and South-eastern Anatolia. The study found that the average age at first marriage was 20.4 years for women who first entered into a civil marriage and 17.9 years for those who first had a religious marriage. Women in this region who married through religious ceremonies tended to do so at significantly younger ages, highlighting the interplay between cultural norms and legal frameworks. Koç and Saraç (2019) provided further insights using TFSS data, revealing that the proportion of women with both civil and religious marriages increased from 87% to 97% over a decade, while the share of religious-only marriages fell from 3% to 1%. Their cohort analyses underscored a generational shift, with younger cohorts increasingly favouring civil-only marriages. These findings underscore the broader trend of declining traditional marriage practices, influenced by increased education, urbanization, and exposure to global cultural norms (Thornton et al., 2012). Acar (2022) disclosed that education plays a pioneering role in the family formation, especially in the age at marriage among women. In this study, it was revealed how higher educational attainment among women correlates with delayed marriage age, which signifies a shift toward more egalitarian gender roles and a change in marriage market expectations. This trend highlights education as a primary determinant of family formation processes, despite persistent sociopolitical pressures favoring traditional norms.

Most studies on religious marriage in Türkiye lack a robust theoretical framework to explain the decline in the prevalence of religious-only marriages. The transformations in marriage practices in Türkiye can be effectively analyzed using key demographic and sociological theories. Modernization theory posits that industrialization and economic development lead to shifts in family structures, weakening extended family ties and parental influence on marriage decisions while fostering nuclear family norms (Goode 1963). In the context of marriage, modernization weakens parental influence on marriage decisions, leading to an increase in marriages initiated by couples themselves. Additionally, rural-to-urban migration in search of better economic opportunities has disrupted extended family systems, favoring nuclear family structures and more individualistic lifestyles. Similarly, demographic transformation theory highlights the transition from high to low mortality and fertility rates, paralleling changes in marriage and family

dynamics (Notestein, 1953). The second demographic transition extends these concepts by focusing on cultural shifts that accompany modernization, such as delayed marriages, increased cohabitation, and declining fertility rates (Van de Kaa, 1999). These changes reflect broader societal shifts toward individualism, gender equality, and women's rights, challenging traditional family models.

Diffusion theory and its related "forerunners framework" further illuminate the adoption of new practices (Rogers 1983, Livi-Bacci 1986). These theories suggest that social change often originates among elite or highly educated groups and gradually diffuses to other segments of society. In the Turkish context, this can be used to understand the adoption of civil marriage practices among certain subpopulations. Finally, developmental idealism theory emphasizes the interplay between modernization and cultural continuity (Thornton et al. 2012). It suggests that hybrid models, blending traditional and modern elements, emerge as societies navigate transitions. This is particularly evident in Türkiye, where dual marriage practices reflect the coexistence of religious and civil ceremonies, demonstrating a balance between modernization and cultural traditions. However, the process is not uniform; resistance to change among certain groups often results in the emergence of hybrid cultural models blending modern and traditional elements (Kavas and Thornton 2013; Kavas and Thornton 2020). For example, in marriage practices, this hybridity is evident in the persistence of traditional customs such as bride price alongside the growing adoption of civil ceremonies, as well as the continued disproportionate burden of household responsibilities on women even within modernizing societies (Cindoğlu et al. 2008; Kavas and Thornton 2013). Similarly, Beşpınar and Beşpınar (2017) state that in addition to the predominance of traditional forms, individual values and practices have become increasingly visible, and that there is a dual structure based on education, SES and region in terms of marriage patterns.

By situating Türkiye's marriage transitions within these theoretical frameworks, this study highlights the complex interplay of tradition, modernity, and socio-demographic diversity, addressing gaps in existing literature and providing a nuanced perspective on marriage practices in a rapidly modernizing society.

DATA SOURCE AND METHODOLOGY

This study utilized data from five surveys conducted every five years from 1998 to 2018, under the Türkiye Demographic and Health Survey (TDHS). These demographic surveys aimed to collect detailed information on fertility levels, infant and child mortality, maternal and child health, and family planning. The samples for these surveys were designed to be nationally

representative, with results that could be analysed across urban and rural areas and five distinct geographical regions of Türkiye. Women aged 15–49 in households, who either lived in the household or stayed there the night before the interview, were considered eligible for inclusion in the survey.

Data were gathered from 8,576 women in the 1998 TDHS, 8,075 ever-married women in the 2003 TDHS, 7,405 ever-married women in the 2008 TDHS, 9,746 women in the 2013 TDHS, and 7,346 women in the 2018 TDHS. The surveys used a complex multi-stage, stratified, and cluster sampling approach to ensure the representativeness of the samples. In order for statistical inferences based on these data to be valid, the representativeness of the sample must be accounted for. To achieve this, sample weights were applied in all analyses to make the sample more representative of the target population. All analyses should use sample weights calculated for each individual interviewed (ICF International, 2012). These sample weights are calculated for each individual and are designed to extrapolate the sample to the broader population.

$$V005^* = \frac{V005 \times (\text{total female population 15 – 49 in the country})}{\text{total number of women 15 – 49 interviewed in the survey}}$$

When pooling datasets from different years, these standard weight variables were renormalized. This normalization was performed by multiplying the standard weight by the female population aged 15–49 in Türkiye on the date of the survey, as reported by the Address-Based Population Registration System (ABPRS) for the years 2008, 2013, and 2018. For 1998 and 2003, the female population was derived from the 1990 and 2000 general population censuses, using an assumption of exponential growth to estimate the population for those years.

In this study, data from all five surveys were pooled, and only women who were married through a religious ceremony and whose first marriage was still ongoing at the time of the survey were selected for first analysis. Women considered married through a religious ceremony in this study included those who were married solely through a religious ceremony, those who had both a religious and civil ceremony but performed religious one first, and those who had both ceremony on the same day, regardless of the order in which the ceremonies occurred. Women who had only a civil ceremony, or whose religious ceremony occurred at least one day after their civil ceremony, were excluded from the analysis. The final sample for descriptive analysis included 21,293 women who met these criteria (Table 1).

For the purpose of examining the transition to civil ceremony among these women, five marriage generations were created based on the date of their first marriage. The generations were grouped as follows: those

married between 2009–2018, 1999–2008, 1989–1998, 1979–1988, and those married before 1978. The time after which women married through religious ceremonies transitioned to civil marriages was calculated separately for each marriage generation. To analyse the timing of this transition, the study employed life table survival analysis, a method commonly used for examining groups experiencing events with time-varying risks. One key advantage of survival analysis is its ability to include both those who experienced the event of interest and those who did not, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the transition process. In this study, the event of interest was the transition from a religious ceremony to a civil marriage. For the life table analysis, only those women who were initially married through a religious ceremony and who did not have a civil ceremony on the same day were selected. The main reason for this selection is that a significant proportion of women who had both religious and civil ceremony did so on the same day, which complicates the analysis of the transition over time. The life table analysis was thus conducted on a sample of 16,267 women who met these criteria (Table 1).

Table 1. Percentage distribution of variables used in the study according to analysis units

		Women who were married through a religious ceremony and in their first marriages		Women who were married through a religious ceremony and in their first marriages and did not have a civil ceremony on the same day		Women who were married through a religious ceremony and in their first marriages and did not have a civil ceremony on the same day and have been married for at least 24 months	
		Weighted percentage	Unweighted number	Weighted percentage	Un-weighted number	Weighted percentage	Un-weighted number
Marriage	2009-2018	10.7	1,838	10.9	1,409	6.9	1,035
Cohorts	1999-2008	26.9	5,601	27.6	4,376	25.2	3,793
	1989-1998	33.3	7,222	33.2	5,536	35.1	5,294
	1979-1988	19.9	4,540	18.9	3,336	22.1	3,330
	1978 and before	9.3	2,092	9.4	1,610	10.7	1,615
Mother Tongue	Turkish	74.6	14,898	67.9	10,323	63.5	9,571
	Kurdish	21.1	5,466	27.2	5,160	31.9	4,801
	Other	4.2	929	4.9	784	4.6	695
Brides Money*	No	79.3	16,089	74.9	11,589	70.9	10,680
	Yes	20.5	5,177	25.0	4,659	29.1	4,387
Consanguinity*	No	73.6	15,249	30.5	5,199	32.4	4,882

	Yes	26.3	6,030	69.4	11,058	67.6	10,185
Region	West	39.4	5,062	33.7	3,076	18.7	2,812
	South	12.1	2,837	12.7	2,189	13.5	2,037
	Central	20.8	3,887	20.4	2,842	17.7	2,662
	North	6.1	2,383	6.1	1,690	10.6	1,601
	East	21.4	7,124	27.0	6,470	39.5	5,955
Residence	Urban	74.9	15,206	73.7	11,441	70.0	10,540
	Rural	25.1	6,087	26.3	4,826	30.0	4,527
HH Wealth	Highest	21.7	3,803	17.0	2,276	13.9	2,087
	Fourth	20.9	4,062	19.8	2,918	17.8	2,676
	Middle	20.0	4,182	21.0	3,274	19.9	3,001
	Second	19.6	4,545	21.5	3,721	22.8	3,442
	Lowest	17.8	4,701	20.7	4,078	25.6	3,861
Total		100.0	21,293	100.0	16,267	100.0	15,067

*The weighted percentage sum of the categories of these variables does not add up to 100 due to a small number of missing observations.

The median transition time for women in each marriage cohort to civil marriage was calculated, providing a valuable measure of the timing of this transition. Among the women who experienced a transition to civil marriage, those with a transition period of 24 months or longer were classified as the “resistant group.” This 24-month threshold was determined by calculating the difference between the median age at first birth and median age at first marriage for women aged 25–49 based on the TDHS data from 1998–2018. Literature suggests that couples are more likely to transition to civil marriage when a pregnancy occurs outside of marriage or after the birth of a child (Mills & Trovato, 2001; Garcia Pereiro et al., 2014). The TDHS data show that the age difference between first birth and first marriage was 1.8 years in 1998 and 2003, 1.5 years in 2008, and 1.9 years in 2013 and 2018. Given the generally sequential nature of fertility and marriage in Türkiye, the 24-month threshold was considered a reasonable marker for this transition.

To further investigate the factors affecting the transition to civil marriage, logistic regression analysis was applied to the data of 15,067 women who had been married for at least 24 months. In this model, the dependent variable was whether the woman had transitioned to an civil marriage by the 24th month. Several independent variables were included to explore the factors influencing this transition: the woman’s mother tongue, whether a bride price was paid, whether the woman was related to her spouse, the household wealth index,

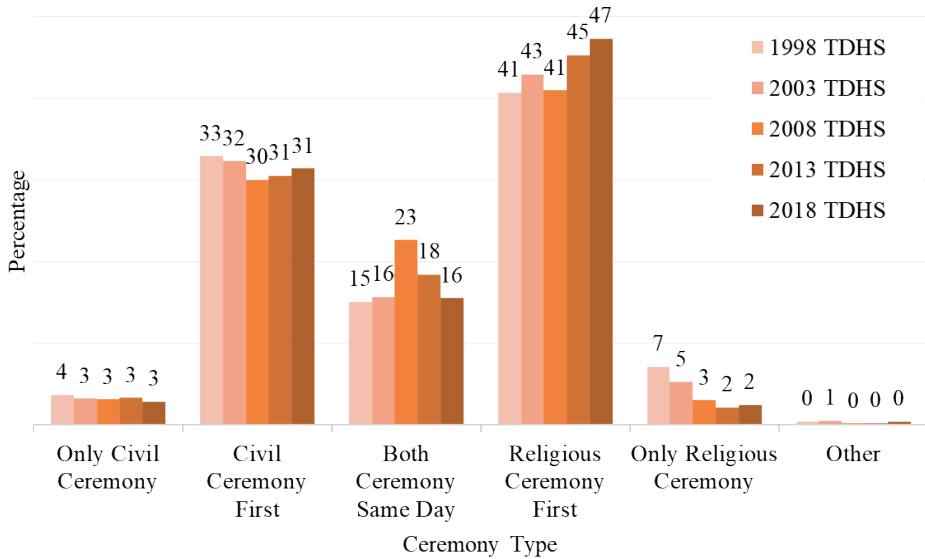
the woman's years of education, the woman's age at first marriage, and the marriage cohort. The household wealth was measured using an index based on the presence of durable consumer goods in the household and housing characteristics, which has been a widely used method for assessing income differences in various settings (Rutstein et al., 2000).

RESULTS

The figure below presents data on women in their first marriages based on marriage type and sequence, as reported in the 1998–2018 Türkiye Demographic and Health Surveys (Figure 1). Over the years, the proportion of women who married solely through civil ceremonies has remained relatively stable at around 3%. Approximately 30% of women in their first marriages initially had a civil marriage, followed by a religious marriage at least one day later. The percentage of women who held both ceremonies on the same day has declined over the past decade, with about one in six women now following this practice. In contrast, there has been an increase in the proportion of women who had both religious and civil ceremonies but began with a religious ceremony, postponing the civil marriage by at least one day. The survey findings indicate that nearly half of the women in their first marriages followed this sequence, having a religious ceremony first and a civil ceremony later. Meanwhile, the rate of women marrying solely through religious ceremonies has significantly decreased, dropping from 7% in 1998 to 2% over the past 20 years.

Table 2 outlines the demographic characteristics of women who were married through a religious ceremony and in their first marriages, categorized by marriage generations. The findings show a significant increase in educational attainment from older to younger generations. While women in the 1978 and earlier generation spent an average of 3.1 years in education, this figure rose to an average of 9 years for the 2009–2018 generation. Similarly, the age at first marriage has increased over time, with younger generations entering into marriage at older ages compared to their predecessors. Regarding linguistic demographics, women whose mother tongue is Turkish consistently outnumber those whose mother tongue is Kurdish or other languages in both older and younger generations. However, the proportion of women whose mother tongue is Kurdish or other languages has risen in the 2009–2018 generation compared to earlier generations. A noteworthy trend is observed in the practice of paying a bride price. This practice declined from the 1978 and earlier generation to the 1999–2008 generation but then showed an increase in the youngest generation (2009–2018). Similarly, the percentage of women in consanguineous marriages has decreased steadily from older to younger generations.

Figure 1. Changes in Types of Ceremony of 15-49 Women in Their First Marriage, 1998 - 2018 TDHS



Regional distribution patterns also shift across generations. The percentage of women in the Western and Eastern regions has increased over time, while the percentage in the Central and Northern regions has decreased. The proportion of women in the Southern region has remained relatively stable, around 12 percent, across all generations. Urbanization trends are evident in the data. The majority of women lived in urban areas, the proportion of women living in cities has risen in younger generations. In the 2009–2018 generation, 81 percent of women lived in urban areas. Finally, an examination of household wealth levels reveals no significant differences between generations, indicating relative consistency in this aspect across the observed time periods.

Table 2. Distribution of Women Who Were Married Through a Religious Ceremony and in Their First Marriages According to Demographic Characteristics

		2009-2018		1999-2008		1989-1998		1979-1988		1978 and before		All Cohorts	
		Mean	UW number	Mean	Unweig. number	Mean	Unweig. number	Mean	Unweig. number	Mean	Unweig. number	Mean	Unweig. number
Education in single years		9.0	1,838	7	5,601	5.6	7,222	4.6	4,540	3.1	2,092	5.9	21,293
Mean age at first marriage		22.0	1,838	20.9	5,601	19.5	7,222	18.3	4,540	16.6	2,092	19.6	21,293
		Weighted percentage	UW number	Weighted percentage	UW number	Weighted percentage	UW number	Weighted percentage	UW number	Weighted percentage	UW number	Weighted percentage	UW number
Mother Tongue	Turkish	67.3	1,180	73.7	3,824	75.7	5,116	77.5	3,302	75.5	1,476	74.6	14,898
	Kurdish	25.4	545	21.8	1,511	20.7	1,821	19.3	1,076	19.9	513	21.1	5,466
	Other	7.3	113	4.5	266	3.6	285	3.3	162	4.6	103	4.3	929
Brides Money*	No	80.9	1,434	84.9	4,507	81.5	5,672	76.6	3,309	59.3	1,167	79.3	16,089
	Yes	19.0	403	15	1,091	18.3	1,540	23.3	1,227	40.2	916	20.5	5,177
Consanguinity*	No	77.5	1,399	76	4,137	73.9	5,173	69.9	3,121	69.4	1,419	73.6	15,249
	Yes	22.5	439	23.9	1,457	26.1	2,045	30.1	1,417	30.6	672	26.3	6,030
Region	West	40.3	434	40.9	1,322	40.7	1,785	37	1,048	34.9	473	39.4	5,062
	South	12.0	220	12	694	12.2	988	12.2	623	12.6	312	12.1	2,837
	Central	17.3	297	20.1	1,02	20	1,261	23.8	908	23.8	401	20.8	3,887
	North	4.3	181	5	544	6.2	816	7.4	554	8.7	288	6.1	2,383
	East	26.2	706	22	2,021	21	2,372	19.6	1,407	20	618	21.4	7,124
Residence	Urban	80.7	1,350	78.9	4,132	74.9	5,173	70.6	3,145	66.3	1,406	74.9	15,206
	Rural	19.3	488	21.1	1,469	25.1	2,049	29.4	1,395	33.7	686	25.1	6,087
HH Wealth	Highest	21.8	321	21.4	935	21.4	1,300	23.2	887	19.9	360	21.7	3,803
	Fourth	20.6	315	19.5	998	22.1	1,431	20.8	899	21.5	419	20.9	4,062
	Middle	19.2	349	21	1,121	19.3	1,354	19.3	884	21.9	474	20	4,182
	Second	19.9	400	20.3	1,237	19.3	1,526	19.7	961	18.6	421	19.6	4,545
	Lowest	18.5	453	17.9	1,310	17.8	1,611	17.1	909	18.1	418	17.8	4,701
Total		100.0	1,838	100	5,601	100	7,222	100	4,540	100	2,092	100	21,293

*The weighted percentage sum of the categories of these variables does not add up to 100 due to a small number of missing observations.

Although the rate of women with religious marriages can be estimated from the research findings, these rates are based on information from women at various stages of their marriages, making it impossible to determine the details of how marriages that began with religious ceremonies transitioned

to civil marriages. To capture the specifics of this transition, it is necessary to track marriages from their inception, focusing on marriage cohorts. An analysis of women who were married through a religious ceremony reveals that approximately half transitioned to civil marriage within the first month (Figure 2). The consistency of this rate over time, regardless of the marriage year, indicates a stable pattern in the transition from religious to civil marriages. However, differences in transition probabilities between marriage cohorts become apparent as the duration of marriage increases. Women who married more recently transitioned to civil marriages more quickly, whereas those from older marriage cohorts exhibited a slower progression. Notably, the transition rate to civil marriage accelerates across all marriage cohorts after the sixth month of marriage. Among more recent marriage cohorts, the rate of transition to civil marriage has increased, paralleling the rise in the proportion of women with civil marriages overall. By the end of the first year of marriage, 88 percent of women who married between 2009 and 2018 had transitioned to civil marriage, compared to 61 percent of women who married in 1978 or earlier. This highlights a significant generational shift in the timing and prevalence of transitioning to civil marriage.

Figure 2. Having both ceremonies among women who were married through a religious ceremony according to the months they spent in marriage and the marriage cohorts

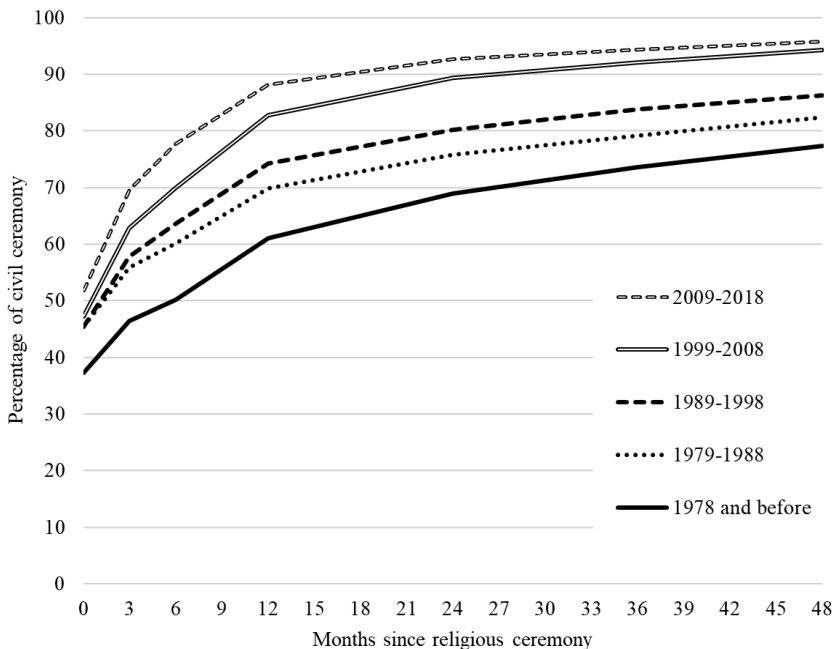
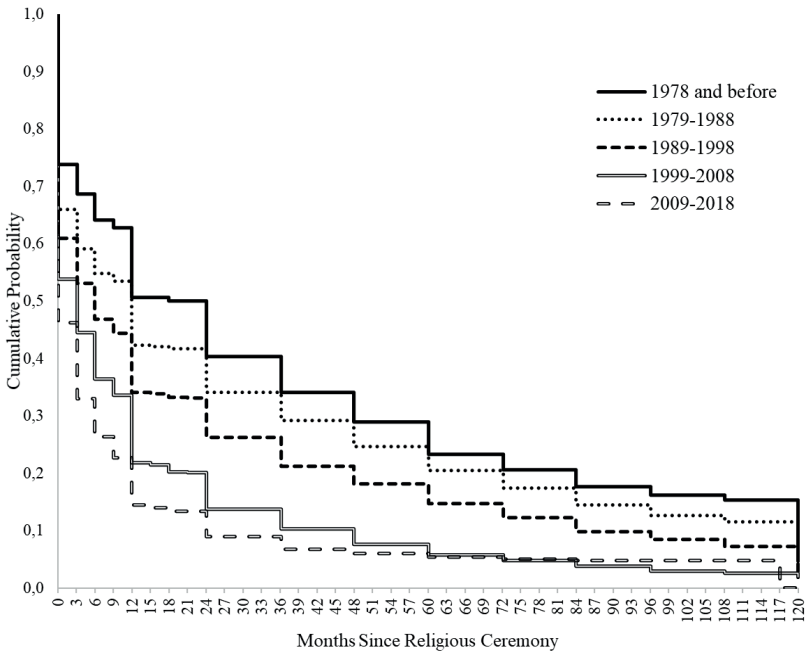


Figure 3 presents the results of the survival analysis conducted using the life table method for women who were married through a religious ceremony and in their first marriages and did not have a civil ceremony on the same day. The figure illustrates the probabilities of remaining in a religious-only marriage during the first 120 months following the start of the marriage. This analysis provides insights into the median transition time to civil ceremony. When examining the median transition times by marriage cohorts, it is evident that significant differences exist across generations. For the most recent cohort (2009–2018), the median transition time to civil marriage was 2.8 months, whereas for the oldest cohort (1978 and earlier), the median time was 24 months. This indicates that half of the women married in the 1978 and earlier cohort transitioned to civil marriage within two years, while the other half remained married solely through a religious ceremony for at least two years. For the 1999-2008 cohort, the median time is 4.2 months, for the 1989-1998 cohort, the median time is 7.5 months, for the 1979-1988 cohort the median time is 12.9 months. The findings reveal a marked decrease in the duration of religious-only marriages over time. However, even women who married between 2009 and 2018 lived in religious-only unions for an average of approximately three months. Additionally, Figure 3 highlights that older marriage cohorts were significantly more resistant to transitioning from religious-only marriages to civil marriages. This generational shift underscores the substantial decline in the prevalence and duration of religious-only marriages in recent years.

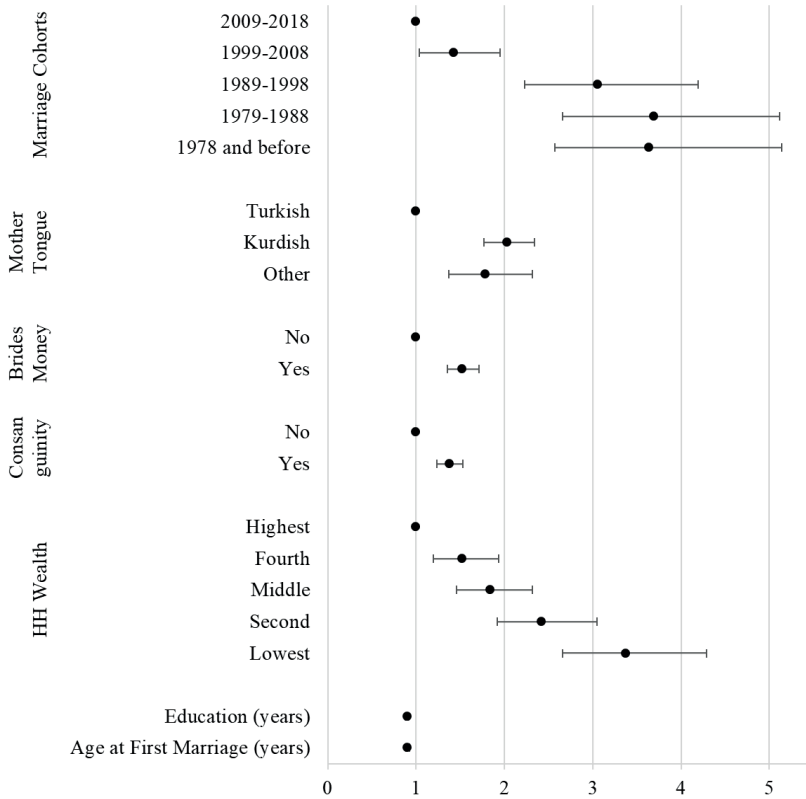
Figure 3. Cumulative probability of women* having civil marriage, according to duration of marriage and cohort



* This analysis is conducted with women who were married through a religious ceremony and in their first marriages and did not have a civil ceremony on the same day.

The results of the logistic regression analysis (Figure 3 and Supplementary Table 1) reveal the factors influencing the resilience of marriages that remain religious-only at the 24th month. The analysis indicates that the likelihood of continuing a religious-only marriage varies significantly by marriage cohort. Women in the 1999–2008 cohort are 1.4 times more likely to remain in a religious-only marriage compared to those in the most recent cohort (2009–2018). Similarly, women in the 1989–1998 cohort are three times more likely, and those in older cohorts are approximately 3.7 times more likely, to continue their marriages without transitioning to a civil marriage. When analyzed by mother tongue, it is notable that women whose mother tongue is Kurdish are approximately twice as likely to maintain religious-only marriages as women whose mother tongue is Turkish. This highlights the importance of linguistic and cultural factors in marriage practices.

Figure 4. Factors determining resistance to transition from religious marriage to civil marriage, logistic regression results*



*This analysis is conducted with women who were married through a religious ceremony and in their first marriages and did not have a civil ceremony on the same day and have been married for at least 24 months

In cases of consanguineous marriages, the probability of resisting the transition to civil marriage increases by 1.4 times. If a bride price is paid at the time of marriage, the probability rises by 1.5 times. Variables such as the arrangement of the marriage, the region of residence, and the urban-rural distinction were not found to be significant in the model and were therefore excluded. Household wealth also play a significant role. Compared to women in the highest wealth group, those in the high wealth group are 1.5 times more likely to remain in religious-only marriages, those in the medium wealth group are 1.8 times more likely, those in the low wealth group are 2.4 times more likely, and those in the lowest wealth group are 3.4 times more likely. This highlights the strong relationship between socioeconomic status and the persistence of religious-only marriages.

The findings also demonstrate that the time spent in education significantly reduces the likelihood of remaining in a religious-only marriage. For each additional year of education, the probability of being in the resistant group decreases by 10%. Similarly, an increase in the age at first marriage reduces the likelihood of remaining in a religious-only marriage by 10% per year.

CONCLUSION

Türkiye has undergone significant demographic and cultural shifts, reshaping marriage practices and family structures. Despite these changes, marriage remains a central social norm in Türkiye's family formation process, highlighting the limitations of explaining these dynamics solely through demographic transition theories. Sociocultural factors, including the role of families in spouse selection and the persistence of traditional norms, continue to shape attitudes toward marriage (Deniz, 2023; Demir, 2013). This study highlights a marked decline in the prevalence and duration of religious-only marriages, driven by generational and socioeconomic changes. Younger cohorts are transitioning to civil marriage more quickly, reflecting broader modernization trends and the increasing influence of education, urbanization, and economic development. However, as Hancıoğlu and Akadlı Ergöçmen (1992) emphasize, it should be kept in mind that all the attributes discussed pertain to the social processes involved in the formation of marital unions rather than the social dynamics of marital life itself.

Religious marriages have undergone significant transformation where the rate of marriages conducted solely through religious ceremonies has dropped considerably, reaching 3% in 2018. However, there has been an increase in the prevalence of dual marriage ceremonies, where both religious and civil marriages are performed together. This dual structure reflects a hybrid model described by Kavas and Thornton (2013), characterized by the coexistence of traditional and modern elements in marriage practices. Traditional rituals such as henna nights, weddings, and dowry presentations, rather than declining with modernization, have persisted and adapted by incorporating modern elements.

Generational differences further underscore these changes. Although the proportion of marriages initiated solely through religious ceremonies has decreased in more recent cohorts, a significant portion of younger generations still begin their marriages with a religious ceremony. The most notable shift is the reduction in the median transition period from religious to civil marriage. For older generations, this period was 24 months, while for more recent generations, it has declined to just 3 months. This demonstrates that while religious-only marriages have become less common and their duration

has shortened, the practice of performing religious ceremonies alongside or following civil ceremonies has increased. These findings suggest that, despite the lack of legal recognition for religious marriages conducted prior to civil marriages, they are viewed as socially and culturally complementary to civil marriages. As Koçak (2010) emphasizes, religious ceremonies are seen as providing religious approval for the civil union in the presence of witnesses and an imam.

The study also reveals that socioeconomic characteristics significantly influence the transition from religious to civil marriage. Women from poorer households, those whose mother tongue is Kurdish, and those with lower levels of education are more likely to remain in religious-only marriages for longer periods compared to women who are more educated, wealthier, and whose mother tongue is Turkish. These findings align with previous research highlighting the role of ethnicity in shaping family formation practices. Studies such as those by Ertem and Koçtürk (2008) and Koç, Hancıoğlu, and Çavlin (2008) emphasize the persistence of patriarchal family structures and traditional practices, such as cousin and cradle marriages, among Kurdish households. These practices not only delay the transition to civil marriages but also reflect resistance to modernization and the deep entrenchment of traditional values. Furthermore, education plays a pivotal role in breaking these patterns, as demonstrated by Acar (2022) who noted that exposure to higher education facilitates shifts toward more egalitarian and modern family practices. Socio-economic inequalities also exacerbate this transition. Higher rates of poverty, lower levels of female education and stronger adherence to traditional norms in regions where these inequalities are more prevalent contribute to longer duration of religious marriages. As Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu et al. (2015) show, these structural factors are strongly associated with early marriages and traditional practices, perpetuating cycles of socio-economic and cultural conservatism.

While the study leverages a robust dataset from the Türkiye Demographic and Health Surveys (TDHS) spanning two decades, several potential biases and limitations should be acknowledged. The reliance on retrospective self-reports for marital events, such as the timing of religious and civil ceremonies, introduces the risk of recall bias. Respondents may not accurately remember the exact sequence or timing of events, particularly for marriages that occurred many years prior to the survey. Although the TDHS datasets are nationally representative, certain subpopulations, such as those in remote rural areas or with highly specific cultural practices, may be underrepresented. This could result in an incomplete depiction of marriage practices across all socio-demographic groups in Türkiye. The study combines data from five survey waves conducted between 1998 and 2018. While normalization techniques were applied to account for differences in sample weights, variations in

survey design, question phrasing, and cultural context over time may have introduced inconsistencies. These differences could influence comparisons across cohorts, particularly for variables sensitive to social or cultural norms. Given the study's focus on women aged 15–49, the findings may not fully capture the marriage practices of other demographic groups, such as older women or men. Future research could address these gaps by including a broader population.

Overall, the modernization process in Türkiye has led to significant changes in marriage practices. The decreasing prevalence of religious-only marriages and the shorter durations of such unions among newer generations are consistent with theories such as the second demographic transition, developmental idealism, diffusion theory, the hybrid model, and the forerunner groups theory. The coexistence of modern and traditional elements in marriage practices positions the hybrid model as particularly relevant for Türkiye. Women who are more educated, wealthier, and whose mother tongue is Turkish serve as pioneers within traditional groups, transitioning from religious to civil marriages more swiftly and embodying the intersection of modernization and tradition in Türkiye's evolving family structure.

The findings of this study offer valuable insights for policymakers aiming to address marriage practices, promote gender equality, and reduce regional disparities in Türkiye. The significant generational decline in religious-only marriages and the shorter duration of such unions highlight the growing acceptance of civil ceremonies. This trend could be leveraged by promoting awareness campaigns that emphasize the legal protections and benefits of civil marriage. The study underscores the role of education in accelerating transitions from religious to civil marriages. Policies aimed at expanding access to education, particularly for women in rural and underdeveloped regions, could further reduce the prevalence of religious-only marriages. Additionally, integrating marriage-related topics into school curricula—such as legal rights, gender equality, and family planning—could empower younger generations to make informed decisions. The persistence of religious-only marriages among certain subpopulations, such as women from Kurdish-speaking households or low-income families, indicates the need for targeted interventions. Regional programs should address socioeconomic barriers by improving access to education and employment opportunities. By addressing these policy dimensions, Türkiye can continue its progress toward modernizing family structures while respecting cultural diversity and ensuring that all individuals benefit from the legal protections and social opportunities offered by civil marriage.

Supplementary Table 1. Factors determining resistance to transition from religious marriage to civil marriage, logistic regression results*

	Categories	Odds Ratio	CI (95%)	
Marriage cohorts	2009-2018 ^r	1.000		
	1999-2008	1.424	1.037	1.954
	1989-1998	3.057	2.229	4.192
	1979-1988	3.689	2.661	5.114
	1978 and before	3.637	2.573	5.140
Mother Tongue	Turkish ^r	1.000		
	Kurdish	2.034	1.768	2.340
	Other	1.782	1.368	2.321
Brides Money*	Yes	1.522	1.353	1.712
	No ^r	1.000		
Consanguinity*	Yes	1.377	1.237	1.532
	No ^r	1.000		
HH Wealth	Lowest	3.378	2.663	4.286
	Second	2.421	1.919	3.053
	Middle	1.842	1.462	2.320
	Fourth	1.521	1.193	1.939
	Highest ^r	1.000		
Education (years)	-	0.900	0.880	0.919
Age at first marriage (years)	-	0.906	0.889	0.923
Wald Chi-Square (14, p<0,001)	1.702			
R² (Nagelkerke)	0,313			
r Reference Category				
*This analysis is conducted with women who were married through a religious ceremony and in their first marriages and did not have a civil ceremony on the same day and have been married for at least 24 months				

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