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Minority rights in distress:

*A case study of Russian speakers' resistance in response to
education policy changes in Latvia before and during the Russo-
Ukrainian War*

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Abstract

In the past decade, studies have examined how the Russian-speaking minority reacted to changes in citizenship, language, and memory politics. However, one aspect that has not been studied is the response to educational policy changes during an ongoing conflict. This study investigates the resistance strategies of Russian-speaking mesolevel actors against minority education policy changes before and during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The study aims to demonstrate how human rights can be defended during geopolitical pressure. To explore this, the research method of qualitative text analysis was applied to evaluate how Russian-speaking actors expressed their resistance in two different periods: before and during the War. The study's results revealed that Russian-speaking actors exhibited limited resistance in both periods due to the lack of communicative spaces and the government's portrayal of their resistance as orchestrated by the Kremlin, thus causing them to face persecution and stigmatization. Lastly, the study's findings are substantial as they point out a connection between human rights advocacy and the impact of ongoing conflicts on them.

Keywords: Resistance, Latvia, Russian-speakers, minority rights, education, Russia, qualitative text analysis, stigmatization.

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List of Abbreviations

RSL- Russian Union of Latvia

CRC- Convention on the Rights of the Child

EU- European Union

NGO- Non-Governmental Organizations

NATO- North Atlantic Treaty Organization

COE- Council of Europe

ECHR- European Court of Human Rights

QTA- Qualitative Text Analysis

LASHOR- Latvian association in support of schools with Russian language education

LSM- Latvijas sabiedriskais medijs

FCNM- Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities

LHRC- Latvian Human Rights Committee

UN- United Nations

1. Introduction: Minority rights in distress

1.1 Research problem

Over the past decade, studies have delved into the Russian-speaking minority's reactions to policy changes in citizenship, language, and memory politics. However, a crucial aspect that remained unexplored was the minority's response to educational policy changes amidst an ongoing conflict. The purpose of this thesis is to address the gap by studying the reaction of the Russian-speaking minority to the amendments in the education law from 2018 to 2022. By employing the concept of resistance articulated by Hollander and Einwohner, the study will investigate how these actors resisted the educational amendments before and during the War in Ukraine and which strategies they employed. Also, with the term mesolevel actors, I will refer to individuals who acted as intermediaries between the Latvian government and the Russian-speaking community: for example, NGO's, parents and pro-minority political parties. The study's contribution is to explore and compare the Russian-speaking actors' resistance against policy changes in minority education during two different periods: before and during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In that way, this study can be the springboard for improving human rights protection and advocacy strategies in states that, under the pretext of geopolitical crisis and national security issues, tend to restrict the rights of minorities.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is an important factor to consider in this study, as it subjected Latvia to significant geopolitical pressure. The study employed Brubaker's triadic nexus model to understand how this pressure affected the Russian-speaking actors' right to advocate for the education rights of Russophone children. Brubaker's model revolves around the idea that the host country, the external homeland, and the minority constantly monitor each other's actions and adjust their behaviour accordingly. In line with this model, the study set out to explore how the Russian invasion of Ukraine impacted Latvia's position to make changes in minority language education policy. It

sought to determine whether this position, in turn, impacted the minority group's ability to resist these changes.

The minority's ability to resist was not the same as during the initial resistance actions in 2003-2004 when the Latvian government started transitioning to a monolingual education system. During that period, Russian speakers in Latvia could actively participate in protests and organize them, which led to changes in education policy ¹. As a result, the percentage of subjects taught in Latvia was set to 60% in the Latvian language and 40% in a minority language ². However, this does not apply to the periods that the study is examining. According to Dahlgren's civic circuit on political engagement, it is clear that Russian-speaking mesolevel actors, particularly human rights defenders, faced challenges in expressing their opposition to governmental policies before and during the War. They had limited opportunities and space to voice their resistance or join in policy debates related to education.

That said, the study's research problem revolves around Russian speaking actors' ability to resist anti-minority measures, such as the education amendments from 2018-2022, during periods of geopolitical pressure. It identifies these education amendments as anti-minority for the following reasons. Firstly, the changes do not comply with Article 114 of the Latvian constitution, which protects the rights of ethnic minorities to preserve their language and cultural identity ³. Also, the amendments conflict with the UN's Convention

¹ I., Brands-Kehris and X., Landes, *Multicultural Education in Latvia*, Latvia, Latvian Center for Human Rights, 2007, p.14.

[https://hum.ku.dk/forskning/publikationer/liste/?pure=da%2Fpublications%2Fmulticultural-education-in-latvia\(c2d0567c-c09d-4d11-9859-4cb18a15f0d7\).html](https://hum.ku.dk/forskning/publikationer/liste/?pure=da%2Fpublications%2Fmulticultural-education-in-latvia(c2d0567c-c09d-4d11-9859-4cb18a15f0d7).html) (Accessed 11 November 2023).

² D. J, Galbreath and N., Muižnieks, "Latvia Managing post-imperial minorities", in B. Rechel (Ed.), *Minority Rights in Central and Eastern Europe*, London, Routledge, 2009, p.137.

³ Republic of Latvia, Article 114, § 8, (1922). The article stated, "Persons belonging to ethnic minorities have the right to preserve and develop their language and their ethnic and cultural identity".

on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in articles 2(1)⁴ and 30, as they deprive Russian-speaking children of the right to be educated in their native language⁵. Since the Ministry of Education, with the support of Latvian policymakers, limited the right of Russian-speaking children to receive education in their mother tongue. This decision was made without consulting the children or their parents, and it removed the children's freedom to choose their preferred educational approach. Therefore, the research problem is how the Russian-speaking mesolevel actors expressed their resistance strategies related to minority education policy changes before and during the Russo-Ukrainian War. Lastly, throughout this study, the term "Russian speakers" or "Russophones" will refer to Latvian citizens with Latvian citizenship but Russian as their mother tongue.

1.2 Statement of Purpose and research questions

This study explores how the Russian-speaking actors defended their education rights in the context of the Russo-Ukrainian War. The study seeks to address the struggle of Russian-speaking actors in influencing policy decisions related to minority language education. The resistance strategies are being examined through the theoretical framework of resistance, political (dis)engagement and the triadic relationship between the Latvian state, Russia and the Russian-speaking minority. I used Qualitative Text analysis to examine 89 news pieces from Russian-speaking media in Latvia. I chose this

⁴ Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 2(1), (20 November 1989). The article stated, "States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status".

⁵ Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 30, (20 November 1989). The Article stated, "In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language".

material because it openly showed the actors' resistance strategies, and I could analyze the sources in their original language due to my fluency in Russian.

The research questions of this study are:

- How did the Russian-speaking mesolevel actors express their resistance strategies related to minority education policy changes before and during the Russo-Ukrainian War?
- What type of resistance did the Russian-speaking mesolevel actors use to articulate their opposition to changes in minority education policies before and during the War?
- How did the resistance strategies of the Russian-speaking actors change from 2018-2022 to 2022-2023?

2. Historical, Cultural and Political Context

2.1 Historical Divergence: A Latvian-Russian story

The historical divergence between Latvia and Russia lies beneath the different understanding of the end of World War II. For Latvian people, the end of World War II indicated the return of the Stalinist oppression, and a period filled with loss and trauma⁶. While, for Russian people, the “Great Patriotic War”, as they called it, marked the end of the Stalinist era and the beginning of the Soviet Union’s hegemony⁷. This different perception of the past shaped the external relationships between the two countries and their future cooperation. However, one might ask how the historical interpretation of the past is relevant to the present situation of Russian-speakers’ minority rights in Latvia. The following paragraphs might help.

By presenting their grand historical narratives in an opposite way, Russia and Latvia aimed to serve their personal interests. The Russian state satisfied its “defender complex”, which according to scholars, is Russia’s self-perception as a “savior” that protected the West from its outside enemies⁸. Latvia, on the other hand, utilized Russia’s colonial past and the aggressive acts it committed during the country’s Soviet occupation to claim its legal restoration⁹. Legal restoration is a term which allowed Latvia, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, to “restore” its independence and not declare it¹⁰. In that way, Latvia was able to reintroduce itself as an independent country whose legal status was interrupted by the illegal annexation of the Soviet Union¹¹. Thus, the legal restoration of

⁶ N., Muižnieks, “History, Memory and Latvian Foreign Policy”, in N. Muižnieks (Ed.), *The Geopolitics of History in Latvian-Russian Relations*, Latvia, Academic Press of the University of Latvia, 2011, p. 16.

⁷ Muižnieks, History, Memory and Latvian Foreign Policy, p.16.

⁸ Muižnieks, History, Memory and Latvian Foreign Policy, p.16.

⁹ Muižnieks, History, Memory and Latvian Foreign Policy, p.13.

¹⁰ Muižnieks, History, Memory and Latvian Foreign Policy, p.13.

¹¹ Muižnieks, History, Memory and Latvian Foreign Policy, p.13.

Latvia and Russia's "savior" complex were the two main elements that will influence the status of the Russian-speaking diaspora in Latvia.

The legal status of the Russian speakers changed after the country's legal restoration in 1991, creating an issue related to whom can be granted the Latvian citizenship¹². Since Latvia claimed that it existed *de jure* during its Soviet occupation, it recognized citizenship rights only to Russian speakers who had acquired their citizenship before the World War II and their descendants¹³. That recognition left the rest of the Russophone population in a legal uncertainty, which exists until today and separates Russian speakers between "stateless" and "non-citizens"¹⁴. That is quite important detail for this study, since the Latvian state's legal status impacted how the minority rights of Russian-speakers were established. Thus, the different historical interpretations that the two countries adopted affected their inter-state relations and shaped their foreign policy regarding the newly appeared Russian speaking minority group in Latvia.

2.2 The Russian World (Russkiy mir): The Russian approach to soft power for Russian speakers abroad

The Russian World (Russkiy Mir) concept was created to help Russia re-brand itself after the 1990s on the international stage and establish its presence globally¹⁵. It functioned as

¹² Muižnieks, History, Memory and Latvian Foreign Policy, p.16.

¹³ Muižnieks, History, Memory and Latvian Foreign Policy, p.16.

¹⁴ Latvia, *Statelessness index* [Website], <https://index.statelessness.eu/country/latvia> (Accessed 5 August 2024).

¹⁵ M., Laruelle, The "Russian World": Russia's Soft Power and Geopolitical Imagination, *Center for Global Interests*, 2015, p.1, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344222398_The_'Russian_World'_Russia's_Soft_Power_and_Geopolitical_Imagination_Center_for_Global_Interests_Papers_May (Accessed 25 June 2024).

a bridge connecting the Russian state with different places worldwide¹⁶. As an idea, it was intentionally vague to adapt to different contexts and reach various audiences¹⁷. In that sense, the Russian state could use the concept to justify its interference in the “Near Abroad”, namely the post-Soviet states¹⁸. According to Russia, this interfering policy was necessary to protect its homeland security interests from destabilizing factors which could derive from the post-soviet space¹⁹. Thus, the supervision of these countries’ advancement for Russia was essential.

During the 2000s and following Putin’s second presidency, the concept was progressively incorporated into the Russian state agencies, representing both Russia’s policy in the post-soviet space and with the Western countries²⁰. For the sake of the thesis’s aim, the study will focus on the NGO diplomacy that Russia employed through the concept. Russia began funding the activities of pro-Russian associations in post-soviet states²¹. However, this support varied according to each country’s governmental stance towards Moscow²². With this strategy Russia supported the creation of a Russian-friendly civil society, which comprised of associations protecting the Russian-speaking minorities’ culture and access to political life (the pro-minority party Russian Union of Latvia, is an example of that)²³.

Adding to its efforts of promoting Russian language and culture, in 2007, the Russian government established The Russian World Foundation, a non-governmental organization working under the auspices of the Foreign Affairs and Education and science ministries to encourage the learning of the Russian language, culture and knowledge of its education

¹⁶ Laruelle, “The Russian World”, p.9.

¹⁷ Laruelle, “The Russian World”, p.15.

¹⁸ Laruelle, “The Russian World”, p.12.

¹⁹ Laruelle, “The Russian World”, p.12.

²⁰ Laruelle, “The Russian World”, p.9.

²¹ Laruelle, “The Russian World”, p.10.

²² Laruelle, “The Russian World”, p.10.

²³ Laruelle, “The Russian World”, p.10.

system in the post-soviet states²⁴. This foundation started providing scholarships and fellowships for students and scholars to conduct their research and studies in Russia.²⁵ It also organized language Olympiads, conferences, training programmes for schoolteachers of Russian speaking schools, competitions, and awards for the best student or teacher of the “Russkiy Mir”²⁶. Hence, the concept of the Russian World with its flexible and vague character became an instrument of soft power through which Russia could influence and manage the relationship it had with both the Russian speaking minorities and their host countries.

2.3 The Latvian approach to minority policy

Latvia formed its minority policy mainly due to its eagerness to join the European Union and NATO. The European Union along with other international organizations actively involved in the creation of Latvia’s minority policy since Latvia had not any previous experience in managing ethnically different groups²⁷. To facilitate and speed up the country’s accession process, EU designed a legal framework for the protection of the newly emerged minorities.²⁸ However, the non-compatibility between Latvia’s domestic legislation and the EU’s legal requirements for minority protection prolonged and troubled its European integration.²⁹ This inconsistency between European and domestic legislation is the result of the country’s legal restorationism and nation-building process³⁰. Latvia, traumatized by the years of the Soviet occupation, rebuilt its national identity by

²⁴ A. Sergunin, *Explaining Russian Foreign Policy Behavior: Theory and Practice*, 1st Ed., Stuttgart, Ibidem-Verlag, 2016, p.51.

²⁵ Sergunin, *Explaining Russian Foreign Policy Behavior*, p.52

²⁶ Sergunin, *Explaining Russian Foreign Policy Behavior*, p.52

²⁷ F. Duina and C. Miani, “Fitting in the Baltics: National Identity, Minorities and Compliance with EU Accession Requirements in Lithuania and Latvia”, *Comparative European Politics*, Vol.13, no.5, 2015, p. 536.

²⁸ Duina and Miani, “Fitting in the Baltics”, p.535.

²⁹ Duina and Miani, “Fitting in the Baltics”, p.545.

³⁰ Duina and Miani, “Fitting in the Baltics”, p.545.

limiting the rights of Russian speakers³¹. The Latvian state was re-established on exclusivity, depriving its non-members of the right to participate in political and civil matters and consequently influence policymaking³². Despite the pressure of the international community towards Latvian legislators to change their approach, their stance remained the same. They continued with the strict language and education policies and denied the ratification of documents that the EU had recommended to Latvia for the establishment of a more inclusive society³³.

Another essential element that cancels out most of the European and international institutions' recommendations for minority protection is the Latvian constitution's projection that new international agreements could not supersede the existing legal framework³⁴. That legal precedent affirmed Latvia's institutional incompatibility with abiding by the EU's legislations for minority protection. Thus, making it more difficult to embrace fundamental changes for the protection and social inclusion of the Russian-speaking minority. Therefore, the continuous support of regional and international institutions along with their representatives' efforts to convince Latvian politicians to "open up" minority policy, influenced Latvia to form a minority protection legislation³⁵.

2.4 The evolution of minority language education in Latvia

The minority education in Latvia is a sensitive issue that has strongly connected with the government's efforts to remove the Russian element from schools which during the Soviet occupation, taught their classes in the Russian language³⁶. To accomplish that, the state promoted policies that enhanced the learning of the Latvian language turning them

³¹ Duina and Miani, "Fitting in the Baltics", p.543.

³² Duina and Miani, "Fitting in the Baltics", p.543.

³³ Duina and Miani, "Fitting in the Baltics", p.546.

³⁴ Duina and Miani, "Fitting in the Baltics", p.546.

³⁵ Galbreath and Muižnieks, "Latvia: Managing post-imperial minorities", p.138.

³⁶ Brands-Kehris and Landes, Multicultural Education in Latvia, p.11.

gradually into bilingual schools³⁷. In 1998, the Ministry of education amended the Education law which supported the creation of four school models of bilingual education at public primary schools³⁸. The 2003 education amendments, which addressed the language of instruction in public secondary schools, caused significant reactions from the Russian-speaking community. This response led to the mitigation of the amendments, which set the proportion of subjects taught in Latvian at 60% and in a minority language at 40%³⁹.

After approximately 11 years later, on the 22nd of March in 2018, the Latvian parliament amended the legislation on Education and General Education, aiming at a gradual transition to Latvian language instruction at public and private secondary schools⁴⁰. The reforms also planned to raise the percentage of the Latvian language in subjects taught by minority educational programmes of public schools at preschool and primary education levels⁴¹. These amendments were implemented legally on the 1st of September 2020 for grades 10 and 11 and on the 1st of September 2021 for grade 12⁴².

On the 29th of September in 2022, the parliament proceeded with the last amendments to the Education Law and General Education Law to gradually transfer all the classes taught only in the Latvian language in three years⁴³. The amendments provided that from the 1st

³⁷ Brands-Kehris and Landes, *Multicultural Education in Latvia*, p.12.

³⁸ Brands-Kehris and Landes, *Multicultural Education in Latvia*, p.13.

³⁹ Galbreath and Muižnieks, “Latvia: Managing post-imperial minorities”, p.137.

⁴⁰ Council of Europe, European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), opinion on the recent amendments to the legislation on education in minority languages, Venice: Council of Europe, 2020. CDL-AD(2020)012, p.9.

⁴¹ Council of Europe, European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), opinion on the recent amendments to the legislation on education in minority languages, Venice: Council of Europe, 2020. CDL-AD(2020)012, p.9.

⁴² Council of Europe, European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), opinion on the recent amendments to the legislation on education in minority languages, Venice: Council of Europe, 2020. CDL-AD(2020)012, p.10.

⁴³ Latvian Ministry of Education, *Transition to a single school* [Website], <https://www.izm.gov.lv/lv/pareja-uz-vienotu-skolu> (Accessed 3 March 2024).

of September in 2023, all the preschool and primary education classes, namely in grades 1st, 4th and 7th grade, will be conducted entirely in Latvian. Subsequently, from September 2024, pupils of the 2nd, 5th and 8th grades will begin their studies too in the Latvian language. From September of 2025, the 3rd, 6th, and 9th grades will also experience the exact change, leading to the complete unification of the educational school system under one language, Latvian⁴⁴. Lastly, the changes in the education system will be applied to both private and public institutions⁴⁵.

2.5 Education amendments of 2003-2004: The Russian-speaking minority's reaction

The development of the education system from a parallel bilingual to monolingual triggered adverse reactions from the Russian-speaking minority. The educational changes in 2003-2004 that foresaw the Latvian language as the only language of instruction at public and private secondary schools created a series of protests and demonstrations in Riga⁴⁶. Weekly protests outside the Ministry of Education and the parliament holding pickets with messages such as “SOS: Save our Schools”, sit-ins, and walk-outs are a few activities the minority organized to express its disapproval of the educational amendments⁴⁷. Apart from protests, the Russophone community planned, with the support of the Latvian Association for the protection of Russian language schools (LASHOR), to read Russian poetry in public promoting the Russian language and urging people to register as advocates for the rights of the Russophone community⁴⁸. LASHOR was not the only advocate of the Russophone minority since many pro-minority political

⁴⁴ Latvian Ministry of Education, *Transition to a single school* [Website], <https://www.izm.gov.lv/lv/pareja-uz-vienotu-skolu> (Accessed 3 March 2024).

⁴⁵ Latvian Ministry of Education, *Transition to a single school* [Website], <https://www.izm.gov.lv/lv/pareja-uz-vienotu-skolu> (Accessed 3 March 2024).

⁴⁶ Galbreath and Muižnieks, “Latvia: Managing post-imperial minorities”, p.142-143.

⁴⁷ Galbreath and Muižnieks, “Latvia: Managing post-imperial minorities”, p.142-143.

⁴⁸ Hogan-Brun, “At the interface of language ideology and practice”, p.325.

parties like the Harmony Party and Union for Human Rights in the United Latvia (now Russian Union of Latvia) were involved in mobilizing the minority, demanding the resigning of the government and the suspending of the reforms to give an extra time to parents and children to adjust to the new situation⁴⁹.

The Russian-speaking minority did not oppose the learning and teaching of the Latvian language, but rather the strategies for implementing the educational reform. Their main concerns were the vagueness of the reform's guidelines and the top-down approach to education policy⁵⁰. The Ministry of Education aimed to utilize educational and financial resources effectively through school optimization plans distributed to Latvian municipalities based on their demographic status⁵¹. Despite the Ministry's efforts to improve the school system, proper training and methodological guidelines for teachers were not provided. In addition, the minority's response with protests and demonstrations prompted the Latvian government, led by President Vaira Vike-Freiberga, to take action to strengthen penalties for violations of the Law on Marches, picketing, and protests to control minors' participation⁵². Therefore, it is clear that the Russian-speaking community's resistance to the 2003-2004 education amendments provoked a negative response from the Latvian government, leading to more stringent measures to suppress their mobilization.

⁴⁹ Hogan-Brun, "At the interface of language ideology and practice", p.327-328.

⁵⁰ Baltic Institute of Social Sciences, *Latvian Education Reform in the context of existing and possible models of bilingualism in Latvian Society: Evaluation of a bilingual school as an example of bilingual education*, Riga, Baltic Institute of Social Sciences, 2003.
http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00001556/01/bilingv_en.pdf (Accessed 1 March 2024), p.8

⁵¹ Baltic Institute of Social Sciences, *Latvian Education Reform and possible models of bilingualism in Latvian Society*, p.8.

⁵² Hogan-Brun, "At the interface of language ideology and practice", p.327.

3. Review of previous research

In this chapter, I will examine previous scholarly works on Russian speakers' reactions to the government's attitude towards mobilization, its restrictions, and the influence of Russian aggression on the Latvian policymaking process.

3.1 The Russo-Ukrainian War and the Russian speakers' demobilization

The examination of the Russian-speaking community's reactions to anti-minority policies in Latvia is an understudied field. Scholars specializing in minority rights have mainly focused on studying the legal and sociocultural aspects of their rights as a minority group. However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine caused researchers to shift their focus and start examining how Russian speakers responded to anti-minority measures implemented by their government after the War. Kuczyńska-Zonik contributed to this by analyzing the reaction of Russian speakers to the dismantling of Soviet monuments in Latvia.

Kuczyńska-Zonik implemented the theoretical concept of resistance and conducted semi-structured interviews with Russian speakers. She discovered that after the beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian War in 2022, the Russian-speaking representatives either remained passive or decreased their resistance against the government's removal of Soviet monuments⁵³. Specifically, she found out that the Russian-speaking community shared feelings of distrust towards the Latvian democratic institutions since the latter do not encourage or allow the people to express their opinions about matters that concern them as a minority⁵⁴. That made people feel that they could not change or impact Latvian

⁵³ A., Kuczyńska-Zonik, "Silent Protesters or Acceptors? The Reaction of the Russian speakers to the Removal of the Soviet Monuments in Latvia and Estonia after Russia's Full-scale Invasion of Ukraine", *Politologija*, vol. 112, no.4, 2023, p.19.

⁵⁴ Kuczyńska-Zonik, "Silent Protesters or Acceptors?", p.32.

policymaking. Also, her interviewees mentioned that they feared the consequences their participation in acts against the government's new memory policy might have for them⁵⁵. Thus, they avoided them.

Another factor that demobilized the Russian-speaking community was its fragmented character⁵⁶. The community's dispersed organization did not allow the coordination of consistent resistance acts between organizations that protect minority rights. Lastly, the outbreak of the War signalled a period of identity transformation and adaptation among the minority group. Russian speakers were in a state of emotional confusion, which drove them to a complete alteration of their stance towards the Soviet past and the Russian language as a language instruction at schools⁵⁷.

Even though Kuczyńska-Zonik's research focused on studying the Russian speakers' reaction to the new commemoration policy of Soviet monuments in Latvia did not fully move beyond the typical themes surrounding the minority. The study primarily examined the role of political memory in mobilising the Russian-speaking minority. However, it retained the sociocultural element related to the Russian speakers' responses to anti-minority measures, making it challenging for other researchers to explore different aspects of this minority group beyond culture and identity. Another researcher encountered the same issue.

Rönngren also examined the reaction of Russian speakers to anti-minority governmental policies after the War. Her research results were similar to Kuczyńska-Zonik's, showing a decrease in the participation of Russophones in resistant actions. Both researchers reviewed the commemoration policy of Soviet monuments. Rönngren supplemented her data sample with interpretations from Latvian experts about the demobilization of the

⁵⁵ Kuczyńska-Zonik, "Silent Protesters or Acceptors?", p.34.

⁵⁶ Kuczyńska-Zonik, "Silent Protesters or Acceptors?", p.33.

⁵⁷ Kuczyńska-Zonik, "Silent Protesters or Acceptors?", p.35.

minority⁵⁸. For example, Professor Hanovs highlighted the country's lack of mass protest culture and resistance acts⁵⁹. He argued that after the 2012 referendum on establishing Russian as a second state language and its negative outcome, Russian speakers lost confidence in Latvian democratic mechanisms⁶⁰. Similarly, Professor Kaprāns stated that the War caused ideological and emotional ambiguity for Russian speakers, as many of them viewed Russia as a liberating power which had now aggressively invaded another Slavic state⁶¹.

Compared with Kuczyńska-Zonik, Rönngren also studied other policies that the War influenced and concerned Russian speakers, such as the media restrictions on accessing Russian-speaking media in Latvia due to security reasons and fear of disinformation⁶². Although Rönngren and Kuczyńska-Zonik have both studied the Russian speaker's resistance to anti-minority policies, they remain close to the research field that traditionally all researchers choose when researching the minority rights of Russophones in Latvia, namely looking at them under the prism of culture and identity formation. Thus, the similarity in their research results indicates a pattern of behaviour in how the War affected the rights of the minority and their freedoms as an ethnically diverse group.

The conditions that led to Russian speakers' restrained response to anti-minority policies can be found in what Cianetti refers to as ethnic and technocratic hollowness. Cianetti contributes to research on minority rights and links it to other factors that influence minority behaviour, by examining the limitations on minority participation in democratic debates and policy discussions. In her study, she argues that ethnic minorities in Latvia are excluded from participatory debates and, as a result, are unable to voice their

⁵⁸ E. Rönngren, "Cancelling Russia: The situation for Russian speakers in Latvia following the invasion of Ukraine", *Baltic Worlds*, Vol. 15, no. 3, p. 24.

⁵⁹ Rönngren, "Cancelling Russia", p.24.

⁶⁰ Rönngren, "Cancelling Russia", p.24.

⁶¹ Rönngren, "Cancelling Russia", p.24.

⁶² Rönngren, "Cancelling Russia", p.26-27.

opposition to governmental policies⁶³. To support her argument, Cianetti borrowed the theoretical concept of “hollowness” from another researcher, Greskovits and applied it to Latvia’s policymaking structure. The idea of “hollowness” allowed her to describe the elite-driven approach that prevails in the country’s decision-making environment and its impact on the political marginalization of the Russophone minority⁶⁴. The ethnic and technocratic “hollowness”, as she calls it, deprives the minority group of the ability to join debate and discussions about policymaking due to its ethnic diversity, thereby diminishing the quality of Latvia’s democratic institutions⁶⁵. According to Cianetti, the elitist perspective held by Latvian political actors about democracy and for whom it should work obstructs the inclusion of minorities in the decision-making process⁶⁶.

In a similar vein, Schulze’s research explored the role those historical legacies, external political actors, and security threats played in limiting people’s right to express themselves in a democratic environment. This complements Cianetti’s work, which focuses on how ethnic and technocratic hollowness obscures minority participation in policymaking and democratic institutions⁶⁷. Schulze applied the idea of neo-militant democracy, which justifies the limitation on civil and political liberties as a measure against the subversion of democracy from within⁶⁸. Her research reveals that Latvia uses its complex historical legacy and Russia’s aggressiveness towards Central and Eastern European countries as a pretext to restrict the political and civic rights of the Russian-speaking minority⁶⁹. Latvian policymakers justified this strategy as necessary to

⁶³ L. Cianetti, “Consolidated technocratic and ethnic hollowness, but no backsliding: reassessing Europeanisation in Estonia and Latvia”, *East European Politics*, Vol.34, no.3, 2018, p.326.

⁶⁴ Cianetti, “Consolidated technocratic and ethnic hollowness, but no backsliding”, p.321.

⁶⁵ Cianetti, “Consolidated technocratic and ethnic hollowness, but no backsliding”, p.321.

⁶⁶ Cianetti, “Consolidated technocratic and ethnic hollowness, but no backsliding”, p.331.

⁶⁷ J. L. Schulze, “Latvia's Soft Neo-Militancy: Limiting Russia's Influence”, in J. Rak and R. Bäcker (eds.), in *Neo-Militant Democracies in Post Communist Member States of the European*, 1st ed, Routledge, 2022, p.42.

⁶⁸ Schulze, “Latvia's Soft Neo-Militancy”, p.43.

⁶⁹ Schulze, “Latvia's Soft Neo-Militancy”, p.44.

safeguard the country's democratic status and territorial autonomy from potential external dangers or individuals who could "sabotage" Latvian democracy from within⁷⁰. The works of Cianetti and Schulze showed that research on the rights of Russian-speaking minorities is expanding into other areas and providing a solid foundation for further exploration of why Russian speakers are reacting passively to anti-minority legislation.

In summary, this thesis examines the responses of Russian speakers in Latvia to anti-minority policies concerning culture, memory, and identity. It also explores the reasons behind the minority community's passive response. The previous studies have mainly focused on the impact of the outbreak of the War in Ukraine on the reactions of Russian speakers to anti-minority government policies. However, they have not compared the reactions of the minority before and during the war. Therefore, this thesis's contribution lies in comparing the minority's responses to anti-minority measures before and during the War in Ukraine. This comparison, not found in previous studies, offers insights into how the Russian speakers' resistance was expressed and formed under changing geopolitical circumstances. The thesis provides empirical data to support previous authors' claims.

⁷⁰ Schulze, "Latvia's Soft Neo-Militancy", p.43.

4. Theoretical framework

In this section, I will lay out the theoretical frameworks I used to examine the resistance strategies employed by Russian speaking mesolevel actors against the education reform. Specifically, I will use Brubaker's triadic nexus model to explain the interactive relationship between the Latvian state, Russia, and the Russian speaking minority. Additionally, I will apply Hollander's and Einwohner's typology of resistance to identify which resistance strategies the Russian speaking actors used before and during the Russo-Ukrainian War to express their disapproval of the education amendments. Lastly, I will utilize Dahlgren's civic circuit for political engagement to complement the typology of resistance by Hollander and Einwohner.

4.1 National minorities, nationalizing states, and external homelands

I will apply Brubaker's triadic nexus model to examine the connection between the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Latvia's policymaking, and the Russian speakers' resistance strategies. Brubaker's triadic nexus model consists of three main actors: a national minority, a nationalizing state, and an external homeland⁷¹. In the following paragraphs, I will provide information on how Brubaker views the three actors for their better comprehension.

According to Brubaker, an external homeland is an attribute a state adopts when it acknowledges ethnonational kin in another country as its member⁷². The political and cultural elites of the state declare that this kin "belongs" to them, which gives them the

⁷¹ R., Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*, 1st Ed., Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 57.

⁷² Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p.58.

right to monitor, maintain and support the kin's interests⁷³. In that sense, a "homeland" does not depend on a specific ethnic composition but rather on political actions⁷⁴. The political actions of an "external homeland" have different forms and can impact the domestic policies of the host states towards their compatriots⁷⁵.

A "national minority" is a dynamic political position not confined by static ethnic composition⁷⁶. National minorities have three main characteristics that define them⁷⁷. National minorities declare their connection with an ethnocultural state different from the politically dominant ethnocultural nation in the country they live in⁷⁸. The nation-state must also recognize the national minority as a distinct ethnic community⁷⁹. Lastly, the state authorities must claim collective cultural and political rights to the national minority due to its ethnic identity⁸⁰. The cultural and political rights of a national minority are diverse⁸¹. These rights can include minority language education and holding political positions in governmental coalitions⁸². In extreme cases, national minorities might demand political and territorial self-government or express separationist tendencies⁸³.

Regarding the nation-state, Brubaker defined the term in his model as "nationalizing" states. The term "nationalizing states" better portrays the dynamic political attitude of nation-states⁸⁴. The characteristic feature of this political attitude is that the state is viewed as unfulfilled and strives to be a fully-fledged state of only one nation⁸⁵. At the

⁷³ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p.58.

⁷⁴ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p.58.

⁷⁵ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p.58.

⁷⁶ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p.60.

⁷⁷ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p.60.

⁷⁸ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p.60.

⁷⁹ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p.60.

⁸⁰ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p.60.

⁸¹ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p.60.

⁸² Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p.60-61.

⁸³ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p.61.

⁸⁴ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p.63.

⁸⁵ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p.63.

same time, the solution usually for this state is to stimulate the language, culture, economic development, and political dominance of the titular nation⁸⁶. Nevertheless, this political attitude of nation-states as “nationalizing states” does not have to be “real” or have a “real impact” upon “national minorities” or the “external homelands”⁸⁷. Based on Brubaker, what matters is if the policies and practices of the titular state or even the “state” itself are understood as nationalizing from the members of the national minority or the “external homeland”⁸⁸. In other words, a “nationalizing” state is perceived as such in the political arena of “national minorities” or “external homelands”, irrespective of the state representatives’ identification as such⁸⁹. However, more than articulating a state as nationalized alone is required. It needs to be justified or socially supported⁹⁰.

4.2 The triadic nexus model

Brubaker adopts a nuanced approach towards the three main actors of his nexus model. Specifically, he prefers to present them as dynamic political attitudes that are not static but continuously contested⁹¹.

Under this notion, “national minorities”, “nationalizing states” and “external homelands”, are portrayed as political viewpoints competing each other⁹². He emphasized the relational connection between these three actors, claiming that their relationship is closely intertwined⁹³. The main characteristic of this triadic liaison is mutual inter-attitudinal monitoring, which means that each political attitude is constantly monitoring the relationship and the actions of the other two attitudes⁹⁴. The reciprocal monitoring

⁸⁶ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p.63.

⁸⁷ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p.63.

⁸⁸ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p.63.

⁸⁹ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p.63.

⁹⁰ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p.64.

⁹¹ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p.67.

⁹² Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p.67.

⁹³ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p.68.

⁹⁴ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p.68.

process is not passive but involves selective attention, interpretation, and representation⁹⁵. Furthermore, what happens to one of the three political attitudes and how it is demonstrated can enhance or weaken existing attitudes or cause new ones⁹⁶. In this case, there are no preexisting perceptions and representations of the political attitude; those are developed interactively⁹⁷. One actor may perceive and represent another actor's attitude⁹⁸. Here, one can observe the beneficial role that Brubaker's nexus model has as a theoretical framework for the study's analysis.

If one views Latvia, Russia, and the Russian-speaking minority as dynamic and interactive fields, one will notice a constant monitoring process between them. Latvia focuses on Russia's relationship with the Russian-speaking communities as a kin state. At the same time, Russia examines the governmental and minority policies adopted by Latvia that are related to the Russian-speaking minority. The Russian-speaking minority, in turn, observes how the two previous actors perceive each other and what kind of representations exist for their external homeland from Latvia. Subsequently, the Russian speakers assess whether the representation of Russia can empower and support them in expressing opposition to Latvia's anti-minority policies or participating in education policymaking. In this context, the nexus model will help in investigating the impact that Russia's aggression as an "external homeland" towards Ukraine had on the mobilization of the Russian-speaking minority.

4.3 Typology of resistance

I will employ Hollander's and Einwohner's typology of resistance to explore its correlation with the Russian-speaking minority's resistance strategies before and during the Russo-Ukrainian War. Specifically, I will apply it as a theoretical tool to investigate

⁹⁵ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p.68.

⁹⁶ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p.69.

⁹⁷ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p.69.

⁹⁸ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p.69.

if and how the War in Ukraine could have influenced Russian speakers' resistance strategies. In this typology, an act is deemed resistant based on three groups: the actors, their target, and the observers involved⁹⁹. Each type of resistance combines the actors' intent with the target and the involved observers' recognition of the act as resistant¹⁰⁰.

Overt resistance is the most common type of resistance. It consists of collective actions perceived as resistant by public observers and the resisters' target audience, and their intention is to be identified as such¹⁰¹. Overt resistance can be expressed through social movements, collective actions, and revolutions¹⁰².

Covert resistance portrays acts of resistance that are deliberately invisible by actors' targets; nevertheless, they are identifiable as resistant by the culturally aware audience¹⁰³. For instance, gossiping or subtle workplace undermining can be considered resistant strategies¹⁰⁴. Scholars like Koczynska-Zonik have utilized this type of resistance to explain national minorities' resistance strategies in situations where the members of the minority group, individually or collectively, cannot resist publicly¹⁰⁵. According to her, minorities use covert resistance as a resistant strategy to achieve policy changes that usually force them to assimilate culturally into the host country's culture without challenging the overall governmental system¹⁰⁶.

Unwitting resistance is a category of resistance that includes acts recognized by targets and observers as resistant¹⁰⁷. However, people who commit those acts do not recognize

⁹⁹ J. A. Hollander and R. L., Einwohner, "Conceptualizing Resistance", *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 19, no.4, 2004, p. 544.

¹⁰⁰ Hollander and Einwohner, , "Conceptualizing Resistance", p. 544.

¹⁰¹ Hollander and Einwohner, "Conceptualizing Resistance", p.545.

¹⁰² Hollander and Einwohner, "Conceptualizing Resistance", p.545.

¹⁰³ Hollander and Einwohner, "Conceptualizing Resistance", p.545.

¹⁰⁴ Hollander and Einwohner, "Conceptualizing Resistance", p.545.

¹⁰⁵ Kuczyńska-Zonik, "Silent Protesters or Acceptors?", p.25.

¹⁰⁶ Kuczyńska-Zonik, "Silent Protesters or Acceptors?", p.25.

¹⁰⁷ Hollander and Einwohner, "Conceptualizing Resistance", p.545.

them as such¹⁰⁸. While unintended acts do not have a “specific” target, the critical element here is that some people might experience acts as dangerous even if they are not¹⁰⁹. Thus, these self-characterized targets are the only ones identifying an act as resistant, which positions them in the following type of target-defined resistance¹¹⁰.

In summary, Hollander’s and Einwohner’s typology of resistance can help identify the strategies the Russian-speaking mesolevel actors used to some extent. Their typology, though, does not cover all the resistance strategies of the minority. Dahlgren’s view on political engagement can follow Einwohner’s and Hollander’s typology, which explains the characteristics of the Russian speakers’ resistance strategies by analyzing his framework for civic cultures.

4.4 Lack of political engagement

This analysis of political engagement (or lack thereof) can help clarify the reasons behind the resistance shown by the Russian-speaking minority in response to changes in education policy. To better understand the resistance of Russian speakers, it is helpful to consider Dahlgren’s perspective on political disengagement. According to Dahlgren, political disengagement involves actively expressing a negative critical stance toward the current political system¹¹¹. Dahlgren further supported this idea by identifying four attitudinal features of political disengagement: resignation, distrust, ambivalence, and indifference¹¹². These characteristics describe people’s behaviours when the political mechanisms of their country neglect them¹¹³. These features apply to Russian speakers’ disengagement in resistance activities. The Russian speakers’ resistance against the

¹⁰⁸ Hollander and Einwohner, “Conceptualizing Resistance”, p.545.

¹⁰⁹ Hollander and Einwohner, “Conceptualizing Resistance”, p.545.

¹¹⁰ Hollander and Einwohner, “Conceptualizing Resistance”, p.545.

¹¹¹ P. Dahlgren, *Media and political engagement: citizens, communication, and democracy*, 1st Ed., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p.81.

¹¹² Dahlgren, *Media and political engagement*, p.82.

¹¹³ Dahlgren, *Media and political engagement*, p.82.

education reform can be considered a form of political disengagement since the Russophone actors actively selected to avoid engagement in resistance acts or to join them. Therefore, Dahlgren's understanding of political disengagement directly applies and can help elucidate how the resistant actions of Russian speakers were expressed.

Dahlgren was concerned about the increase in democratic deficit due to citizens' disengagement¹¹⁴. He argued that the absence of political participation is strongly connected to everyday life influenced by social structures and cultural elements¹¹⁵. For him, modern democratic societies exhibit undemocratic characteristics that give citizens the impression that their opinions do not matter¹¹⁶. When people perceive that the political elite intentionally ignores them and does not allow them to participate in political matters, this undermines citizen participation in the long term¹¹⁷.

In addition to that, he studied the concept of economism, which prioritizes the economy, as the main criterion of rationality above other values and criteria in society¹¹⁸. Economism can be considered a founding pillar of modern Latvia, fostering a technocratic approach to policymaking. Through economism, Latvia embraced values such as efficiency, profitability, and calculability, which replaced democratic values vital for civil resilience¹¹⁹. The ideology of economism that Dahlgren argues about gives a good theoretical foundation to explore whether the level of open resistance of the minority against governmental policies was influenced by the dominance of economism in Latvian policymaking. To explore its effects on democracy and institutions, Dahlgren proposed a civic culture model to promote civic engagement. Civic cultures can provide a theoretical framework for examining the prerequisites for fostering civic engagement¹²⁰.

¹¹⁴ Dahlgren, Media and political engagement, p.81.

¹¹⁵ Dahlgren, Media and political engagement, p.81.

¹¹⁶ Dahlgren, Media and political engagement, p.82.

¹¹⁷ Dahlgren, Media and political engagement, p.82.

¹¹⁸ Dahlgren, Media and political engagement, p.20.

¹¹⁹ Dahlgren, Media and political engagement, p.20.

¹²⁰ Dahlgren, Media and political engagement, p.103.

The civil culture model can be an analytical framework to understand the different acts of resistance from the Russian speaking minority. This model consists of six elements:

- Knowledge shows that people need to be well-informed about the topics they discuss¹²¹. To achieve this, they should have access to sources that enable active participation in public life¹²². Citizens should also be able to acquire knowledge, which requires developing certain practices and skills¹²³.
- Values preserve a society's democratic structure. Without embracing values such as tolerance and cooperation, citizens cannot sustain a functioning democratic society in their daily lives¹²⁴.
- Trust is a crucial element that holds democratic societies together. Dahlgren explored the concept of trust between citizens or groups of citizens, referring to "thick and thin" trust¹²⁵. According to Dahlgren, thin trust enables citizens to develop a sense of "we-ness" regarding specific issues or ideologies that involve like-mindedness¹²⁶. This type of trust is connected to democratically structured political societies¹²⁷.
- Spaces provide a place for citizens to communicate and collaborate on political initiatives¹²⁸. They also serve as a venue for citizens to engage with political representatives and participate in policy discussions and decision-making

¹²¹ Dahlgren, Media and political engagement, p.108.

¹²² Dahlgren, Media and political engagement, p.108.

¹²³ Dahlgren, Media and political engagement, p.109.

¹²⁴ Dahlgren, Media and political engagement, p.110.

¹²⁵ Dahlgren, Media and political engagement, p.113.

¹²⁶ Dahlgren, Media and political engagement, p.113.

¹²⁷ Dahlgren, Media and political engagement, p.113.

¹²⁸ Dahlgren, Media and political engagement, p.114.

processes¹²⁹.

- Democracy can grow through practices¹³⁰. For practices to be able to transmit the ideals of democracy, they need to develop a personal and social sense to people¹³¹. In addition, these practices should have the form of a routine to integrate into the civic culture¹³². Practices also can be and are learned because they acquire certain skills to be applied¹³³. Hence, some practices acquire more knowledge and time to be learned and can be used by a few people¹³⁴. Influencing the former features and practices can help the creation of spaces and the cultivation of civic identities.

- Identity is how individuals perceive themselves as part of a democratic society¹³⁵. Identity is complex and allows people to fulfil multiple roles in different situations¹³⁶. For example, a parent can act as both a citizen and a parent and may choose to participate or not in acts of resistance. The social environment and institutional mechanisms can influence how a person's identity develops¹³⁷. Also, experiences play a crucial role in shaping identity, and these experiences are often influenced by emotions¹³⁸. Therefore, the identity of a Russian speaker as a member of both the minority group and the resistance activities can be shaped by the experience that the Latvian government has. This experience can be based on the emotions it has towards the presence of the Russian-speaking minority in Latvia.

¹²⁹ Dahlgren, Media and political engagement, p.115.

¹³⁰ Dahlgren, Media and political engagement, p.116.

¹³¹ Dahlgren, Media and political engagement, p.116.

¹³² Dahlgren, Media and political engagement, p.116.

¹³³ Dahlgren, Media and political engagement, p.117.

¹³⁴ Dahlgren, Media and political engagement, p.117.

¹³⁵ Dahlgren, Media and political engagement, p.118.

¹³⁶ Dahlgren, Media and political engagement, p.119.

¹³⁷ Dahlgren, Media and political engagement, p.119.

¹³⁸ Dahlgren, Media and political engagement, p.119.

5. Methods

To answer the thesis's research questions, I conducted a systematic qualitative text analysis (QTA) of the Russian-speaking newspaper articles, podcasts, TV and radio shows broadcasted from Latvia's popular media outlets and the Russian-speaking minority's blog. In the following paragraphs, I will first explain what Qualitative Text Analysis is, as described by Udo Kuckartz and why I chose it as the research method for this study. Afterwards, I will display the data collection sample and the criteria according to which it was selected. Lastly, I will describe my research design and list the thesis's possible limitations.

5.1 Qualitative Text Analysis

According to Kuckartz, qualitative text analysis is a collaborative research method combining the characteristics of three approaches: hermeneutics, grounded theory, and classical content analysis¹³⁹. Although these approaches are rooted in different theoretical frameworks, each has borrowed qualitative text analysis features that helped shape it as a separate method. Specifically, from hermeneutics, qualitative text analysis has adopted its interpretative character since it contributes to a better interpretation and understanding of the text related to its context¹⁴⁰. In this way, the researcher can be aware of the interactive and reflective nature of the analysis process. Besides that, qualitative text analysis has also incorporated hermeneutic capacity to be aware of the presumptions and biases associated with the research question¹⁴¹.

¹³⁹ U., Kuckartz, *Qualitative Text Analysis: A guide to methods, practice and using software*, Los Angeles, SAGE, 2014, p.15.

¹⁴⁰ Kuckartz, *Qualitative Text Analysis*, p.17.

¹⁴¹ Kuckartz, *Qualitative Text Analysis*, p.20.

Grounded theory has provided qualitative text analysis with valuable techniques and methods to work with codes and categories¹⁴². The researcher can allocate codes to specific phenomena and create categories and subcategories with grounded theory¹⁴³. As a method, grounded theory has provided the necessary tools to systematically organize information into codes and categories while remaining flexible in creating these codes and categories¹⁴⁴. Lastly, qualitative content analysis emphasizes the underlying meaning of texts and examines their communicative significance¹⁴⁵. The methods mentioned above are the essential components that have shaped qualitative text analysis into what it is today.

5.2 Benefits of qualitative text analysis

Qualitative text analysis is a systematic method that benefits my study greatly. It allowed me to work and create categories and sub-categories creatively and flexibly without focusing solely on a specific theory from the beginning of the study. Also, I could interpret the collected data according to their context, acknowledge the interactive nature of the different phases of my analysis, and reflect on them by creating memos¹⁴⁶. Therefore, I could analyze some data and simultaneously continue collecting more. Qualitative text analysis' versatility helped me categorize the data systematically. I could code the gathered data in order by following rules for each analysis phase¹⁴⁷. I was able to delve deeper into the news pieces and analyze in detail the resistance strategies of the Russian-speaking actors, gaining a better understanding of the sociopolitical context happening in Latvia during the studied period. For all the above reasons, I chose to

¹⁴² Kuckartz, *Qualitative Text Analysis*, p.29.

¹⁴³ Kuckartz, *Qualitative Text Analysis*, p.24.

¹⁴⁴ Kuckartz, *Qualitative Text Analysis*, p.27.

¹⁴⁵ Kuckartz, *Qualitative Text Analysis*, p.31.

¹⁴⁶ Kuckartz, *Qualitative Text Analysis*, p.36.

¹⁴⁷ Kuckartz, *Qualitative Text Analysis*, p.36.

analyze my data sample using the qualitative text analysis method, emphasizing interpretation over numerical categorization.

5.3 Data collection sample

To explore the resistance strategies that Russian-speaking mesolevel actors utilized before and during the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the type of their resistance, I analyzed 89 news pieces from Russian-speaking media in Latvia from 2018-2023. Regarding news pieces, I refer to newspaper articles, radio and TV show interviews, blog posts, podcast interviews, and press releases. Specifically, from 2018-2022, I analyzed 40 news pieces and from 2022-2023, 49 news pieces.

The collected data were transcribed, translated from the Russian to the English language, and then analyzed according to the following criteria:

Type of media

The type of media from which I extracted the data was selected based on nonprobabilistic sampling strategies and specifically on purposive sampling¹⁴⁸. According to purposive sampling, the selection of the sample is direct and predefined by the researcher to align with the study's objective¹⁴⁹. Considering that, I decided to collect most of the data sample from Latvia's Public Broadcasting Media (*Latvijas sabiedriskais medijs*), a publicly funded radio and television organization run by both Latvia's public broadcasters, namely Latvian Television and Radio Latvia. Latvia's public broadcasting media is a popular source from which Russian-speaking mesolevel actors have expressed their views on education amendments before and during the Russo-Ukrainian War.

¹⁴⁸ J. Ørmen, "Quantitative approaches to media and communication research", in Jensen, K.B. (Ed.), *A Handbook of Media and Communication Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Methodologies*, London, Routledge, 2020, p.260.

¹⁴⁹ Ørmen, "Quantitative approaches to media and communication research", p.260.

However, besides the Latvian Public Broadcasting Media, I analyzed newspaper articles and blog posts from Delfi.lv, grani.lv, Baltnews, kontekst.lv and Council of Public Organizations of Latvia, an umbrella organization for Russian-speaking civil and cultural organizations, where Russian-speaking actors express openly their opinion on social and political issues in Latvia. These media outlets were another source through which the Russian-speaking actors expressed their opposition to the education policy changes; that is why I chose them.

Group of people

To better understand how much space the Russian-speaking minority had to express their resistance to anti-minority policies and engage in education policymaking, I chose to examine the resistance strategies only of Russian-speaking mesolevel actors. The term Russian-speaking mesolevel actors refers to schoolteachers and directors, parents, human rights defenders, association representatives and pro-minority political parties who operated as intermediates between the Latvian government and the Russian-speaking minority. These actors also expressed their disapproval of the education policy changes the most.

Language

I chose to review and analyze the media sources that offered their material in Russian for two main reasons. First, my fluency in the Russian language gave me easy access to media sources that were not available in English. Second, I could study the sources in their original language, enhancing my understanding of the context concerning Russian-speaking actors' resistance efforts and strategies towards educational reform.

Time

The sample data is drawn from a specific period of six years, from 2018 to 2023. The focus on this period is not random. I investigated the resistance of Russian-speaking

mesolevel actors to the changes in minority education policy in two different time sequences and within a relatively short timeframe, as the entire study was conducted as part of the master’s programme. The studied period is characterized by the intense attempts of the Latvian government to alter the status of minority language education. Specifically, in 2018, the Ministry of Education adopted educational amendments for the transition of secondary schools, both private and public, pushing for a more assimilationist stance in the educational system. The pressure for the promotion of a monolingual school system continued and intensified after February 2022 possibly due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, with the complete abolition of minority language education. Thus, this time sequence was an opportunity to compare and explore the minority's ability to resist anti-minority measures and defend its rights before and during the geopolitical pressure around it.

5.4 Research design

To answer the study’s research questions related to the resistance strategies that the Russian speakers employed to express their opposition, I conducted the following steps:

Number	Phase	Description
1	Preliminary work with the text ¹⁵⁰	Read the news pieces and tried to get a general understanding of the context.
2	Translation of the data and highlighting important text passages ¹⁵¹	Translated the news pieces to the English language and highlight important lines from the text related to the research question.

¹⁵⁰ Kuckartz, *Qualitative Text Analysis*, p.48.

¹⁵¹ P.Bazeley, *Qualitative data analysis: practical strategies*, 1st Ed., London, SAGE, 2013, p.64.

3	Creation of descriptive codes 152	Created descriptive codes on Microsoft excel. For each descriptive code I recorded the actor, the date, the name of the media and the type of media.
4	Creation of analytical codes 153	After having my descriptive codes, I created my analytical codes. The analytical codes were classified according to three categories (engaging in resistance acts, need for belonging and stigmatization).
5	Creation of sub-categories ¹⁵⁴	I read the categories and created sub-categories to specify even more the resistance strategies of the actors. In the category of engaging in resistance acts, I created two subcategories: intense participation and moderate participation. In the category need for belonging I created two subcategories: as citizens of Latvia and as citizens of the same nation. In the category stigmatization, I created two sub-categories: persecution and intimidation.
6	Produce the analysis report	I chose the most relevant categories and sub-categories for answering the research questions.

¹⁵² Bazeley, Qualitative data analysis p.78.

¹⁵³ Kuckartz, Qualitative Text Analysis, p.58.

¹⁵⁴ Kuckartz, Qualitative Text Analysis, p.59-60.

Table 1: The phases 1,4,5,6 are inspired from Kuckartz. Phases 2 and 3 are inspired by Bazeley.

5.5 Research limitations

The main limitations of this study are the following:

Language

The study analyzed news pieces only from Russian-speaking media. This Russian-speaking-oriented analysis has limitations since I could not examine the actors' discourse on their resistance strategies in Latvian-speaking media. However, it enabled me to investigate the sources in which the actors felt more comfortable discussing their resistance against governmental policies.

Media

When researching the resistance strategies of Russian-speaking actors through media analysis, it is essential to note that the media owners may influence the news agenda to serve their interests ¹⁵⁵. Therefore, the news pieces collected from Russian-speaking sources may reflect the media owners' intentions when targeting Latvia's Russian-speaking audience. Additionally, Russian-speaking actors could potentially use the media to promote specific worldviews. According to Dahlgren, those who control the media can shape the news's reality ¹⁵⁶. As a result, this can make it difficult for researchers to determine whether the information presented accurately reflects reality or is a distorted representation. Despite these challenges, media analysis remains a valuable tool for understanding acts of resistance that are significant to the public.

¹⁵⁵ Dahlgren, Media and political engagement, p.50-51.

¹⁵⁶ Dahlgren, Media and political engagement, p.50.

6. Analysis

In this chapter, I will answer the research questions of this study: How did the Russian-speaking mesolevel actors express their resistance strategies related to minority education policy changes before and during the Russo-Ukrainian War? What type of resistance did the Russian-speaking mesolevel actors use to articulate their opposition to changes in minority education policies before and during the War? How did the resistance strategies of the Russian-speaking actors change from 2018-2022 to 2022-2023?

To address them, I used the typology of resistance by Hollander and Einwohner, Brubaker's triadic nexus model and Dahlgren's civic circuit model. By applying the method of qualitative text analysis, I analyzed 89 news pieces that consisted of podcasts, radio and TV interviews, newspaper articles and blog posts. The analysis to present the resistance strategies of the actors will be divided into two periods, from 2018-2022 and from 2022-2023 and into five Russian-speaking mesolevel actors, namely pro-minority political parties, the Latvian Association for the Support of Russian Schools (LASHOR), human rights advocates, parents and school directors and teachers. The choice of the actors is not random. The collected data showed that those actors resisted the most against the education policy changes. Lastly, each of these actors represented a group of people who worked and were affected by the policy changes either directly or indirectly.

6.1 The persistence for resistance: Russian-speaking actors' resistance struggles from 2018 to 2022

Pro-minority political parties

The resistance strategies of the two pro-minority political parties, the Russian Union of Latvia (RSL) and Harmony (Saskenas), differed in their expression. The Russian Union of Latvia (RSL) engaged more intensely in resistance activities against the amendments

targeting minority language education. Some of its resistant activities included organizing protests and creating petitions to collect signatures to preserve minority language education¹⁵⁷. The leader of the party, Tatiana Zdanok, argued that, “It was impossible not to react to those politicians who were elected with the voices of Russian speakers who represent these people¹⁵⁸.” Her words reflected the responsibility that RSL felt that it had to defend the education rights of Russian-speaking children. To fulfil this responsibility, the party planned to increase the Russian speakers’ engagement in joining more resistant acts, as they did during the 2003-2004 protests. Thus, its resistant acts began incorporating a symbolic meaning. For instance, one of its protests was organized intentionally on Children’s Day, during which party members handed children’s drawings with the message “Our children are our right” to the participants¹⁵⁹. Simultaneously, the participants held in their hands Russian and Latvian flags, flags with RSL symbols and posters with the inscriptions “The school year is over - the fight continues” and “Stop the language genocide!” “If there is no respect, there is no loyalty”, “This is not a reform is repression”, and “No assimilation!” to actively express their disapproval of the reform and illustrate their support for resistant acts like this one¹⁶⁰. However, symbolic resistance acts alone were insufficient to mobilize the Russian-speaking people.

¹⁵⁷ В Сейм поданы подписи за сохранение билингвального образования, *Rus.lsm.lv*, 22 January, 2018, <https://rus.lsm.lv/statja/novosti/politika/v-seym-podani-podpisi-za-sohranenie-bilingvalnogo-obrazovanija.a265159/>, (Accessed 8 August 2024).

¹⁵⁸ А., Конохов, “Жданок возвращается в Латвию, чтобы бороться с реформой образования”, *Rus.lsm.lv*, 5 February 2018, <https://rus.lsm.lv/statja/novosti/politika/jdanok-vozvraschaetsja-v-latviyu-htobi-borotsja-s-reformoy-obrazovanija.a266764/>, (Accessed 8 July 2024).

¹⁵⁹ “В Риге вновь протестовали против перевода школ на латышский язык”, *Rus.lsm.lv*, 2 June 2018, <https://rus.lsm.lv/statja/novosti/politika/v-rige-vnov-protestovali-protiv-perevoda-shkol-na-latishskiy-jazik.a280609/>, (Accessed 8 July 2024).

¹⁶⁰ “В Риге протестовали против перевода школ на латышский язык”, 2 June 2018.

To keep the Russophones engaged in resistance acts against the education reform, RSL tried new resistance methods. For example, in 2021, the party collaborated with the Latvian Human Rights Committee (LHRC) to file claims against the education reform to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR)¹⁶¹. To simplify the litigation process, RSL created a questionnaire on the website of the community of parents in Latvia. Accordingly, the LHRC would draw up an individual claim, which must be sent to court¹⁶². In the future, the LHRC would accompany the claim and correspond with the court on behalf of the applicants¹⁶³. The party used social media, specifically its Facebook account, to summon parents to join the mass claims filings. In one of its posts, for instance, the party urged:

“All parents of schoolchildren in grades 10-11 need to file a claim against the language reform in secondary schools with the ECHR as soon as possible due to the insufficiency of claims to speed up the procedure for their consideration, but our children. There is no time to wait for review in the usual way. Therefore, join the action right now! Together, we will succeed! Do it right now! There is very little time left ¹⁶⁴.”

¹⁶¹ “Русские родители Латвии еще могут подать иски в ЕСПЧ о запрете родных школ”, *Baltnews*, 22 February 2021, https://lv.baltnews.com/school_Russian/20210222/1024610051/Russkie-roditeli-Latvii-eshe-mogut-podat-iski-v-ESPCh-o-zaprete-rodnykh-shkol.html, (Accessed 8 July 2024).

¹⁶² “Русские родители Латвии еще могут подать иски в ЕСПЧ о запрете родных школ”, 22 February 2021.

¹⁶³ “Русские родители Латвии еще могут подать иски в ЕСПЧ о запрете родных школ”, 22 February 2021.

¹⁶⁴ “Русские родители Латвии еще могут подать иски в ЕСПЧ о запрете родных школ”, 22 February 2021.

Therefore, the abovementioned resistance strategies demonstrated how RSL expressed opposition to minority education reform as a Russophone mesolevel actor.

The social democratic party Harmony, in contrast, embraced more legally oriented strategies to resist the education amendments. The choice to defend minority language education through legal means was not random. The party utilized many of its members' knowledge of minority rights and human rights law to deploy strategic litigations to the Latvian Constitutional Court and the European Court of Human Rights. Thus, in Harmony's resistance, knowledge was essential to its strategies. Without the ability of the members to acquire knowledge of human rights law and understand the meaning of minority rights in a society, the resistance acts of the party would not be feasible at all. In his civic circuit, Dahlgren referred to the significance of knowledge and "knowledge acquisition" as a necessary element that people should possess to engage in affairs and debates that concern them politically ¹⁶⁵. The most famous litigation of Harmony was before its dissolution after the election of October 2022 ¹⁶⁶. A group of party members appealed to the Latvian constitutional Court to state the inconsistency of the educational amendments based on the Constitution's main articles ¹⁶⁷. As one of the party members said, the strategic litigations allowed them to

"Argue in great detail and prove with figures and facts

¹⁶⁵ Dahlgren, media and political engagement, p.112.

¹⁶⁶ Е., Кривцова, "В наших школах ухудшится качество образования", interview by Светлана Гинтер, *Латвийского радио 4*, Rus.lsm.lv, 27 February 2019, <https://rus.lsm.lv/statja/novosti/obschestvo/v-nashih-shkolah-uhudshitsja-kachestvo-obrazovaniya--istci-po-delu-o-jazikovoy-reforme.a311059/> (accessed 8 July 2024).

¹⁶⁷ Б., Цилевич, "В наших школах ухудшится качество образования", interview by Светлана Гинтер, *Латвийского радио 4*, Rus.lsm.lv, 27 February 2019, , <https://rus.lsm.lv/statja/novosti/obschestvo/v-nashih-shkolah-uhudshitsja-kachestvo-obrazovaniya--istci-po-delu-o-jazikovoy-reforme.a311059/> (Accessed 8 July 2024).

that the norms that they are challenging do not comply with the principle of proportionality, violate the right to equality in the field of education, the right to education of equal quality, which is provided for by the constitution, as well as the right of national minorities to preserve their identity¹⁶⁸.”

Thus, Harmony, as a Russian-speaking mesolevel actor, selected the legal path to resist the education reform’s negative consequences for minority language education.

The resistance strategies RSL and Harmony chose to express their resistance against the education reform adopted characteristics from Hollander’s and Einwohner’s typology of resistance¹⁶⁹. Specifically, RSL reflected the type of overt resistance. The collective act the party employed as protests, demonstrations, and petitions were recognized as resistance by the RSL’s public audiences, the Latvian and Russophone society, and its target, the Ministry of Education. Besides recognizing the acts as resistant by the former group of people, the political party intended for its activities to be identified as resistant. However, it did not hide its resistant nature. All these elements positioned it in the type of overt resistance.

Harmony’s strategic litigations, on the other hand, borrowed features from the type of covert resistance. The party’s resistant actions are indeed intentionally undetectable by its target audience, the Ministry of Education; however, they follow Koczynska-Zonik’s interpretation of covert resistance as displayed in chapter four of this study¹⁷⁰. Under this interpretation, Harmony’s strategic acts aimed to resist the minority education policy changes that drove them to cultural assimilation without asking for a general governmental makeover. Two elements influenced the party’s type of resistance. Harmony used people

¹⁶⁸ Цилевич, “В наших школах ухудшится качество образования”, 27 February 2019.

¹⁶⁹ Hollander and Einwohner, “Conceptualizing Resistance”, p.545.

¹⁷⁰ Kuczyńska-Zonik, “Silent Protesters or Acceptors?”, p.25.

who knew minority rights and how the European and International Institutions for minority rights protection worked. So, applying legal methods of resistance to resist the education reforms was easier. Another element is that the party selected to resist through legal means and not with public manifestations such as street marches. They possibly wanted to avoid the negative public attention that the Ministry of Education was giving to the topic. Hence, Harmony's choice of not resisting the education policy changes openly but through the discretion that a lawsuit offers gives their actions the type of covert resistance.

Latvian Association for the Support of Russian Schools (LASHOR)

The Latvian Association for the Support of Russian Schools (LASHOR) also communicated its resistance against the governmental changes in the education policy. LASHOR's main resistance strategies were the organization of protests and petitions. For LASHOR, the protests aimed to enhance the participation of Russian speakers in resistance activities. The president of LASHOR, Igor Pimenov, utilized various slogans to mobilize the people and, at the same time, express gratitude to the ones who were already joining the demonstrations. Phrases such as "Protest is our word!", "We must take our hats off to those people who find the time to come to protests" and "They show what they are against" were the most popular ones¹⁷¹. Regarding the petitions as a form of resistance, LASHOR started a petition to collect signatures for "adopting a Law on National Educational Institutions for Minorities" that would provide the opportunity to students from the national minorities to study in Latvia in their mother tongue¹⁷². Therefore, LASHOR's resistance actions were expressed in the same

¹⁷¹ С. Герасимов, "День одной реформы: от пикета и дебатов до министра, декламирующего Пушкина", LTV7, 8 February 2018, <https://rus.lsm.lv/statja/novosti/obschestvo/den-odnoy-reformi-ot-piketa-i-debatov-do-ministra-deklamiruyuschego-pushkina.a267219/> (Accessed 8 July 2024).

¹⁷² "Более 4770 человек подписали", *Лашор* [press release], 2 April 2021, <http://www.lashor.lv/rus/index.php> (accessed 8 July 2024).

way that RSL demonstrated its disapproval of the education amendments.

However, LASHOR's resistance strategies had a different meaning than those of the pro-minority parties. LASHOR's resistant acts illustrated the need for Russian speakers to belong in Latvian society and participate in education policymaking. "Nobody consulted with us - with those who should send their children and grandchildren to schools ¹⁷³." That was the statement that the president of LASHOR shared, illustrating the exclusion of Russian-speaking parents from the education decision-making. Apart from that, he argued in every protest: "We are Latvia! School can teach the Latvian language to our children in Russian!" "Latvia is our common home! We are all Latvia!" and "Respect for the Latvian language!" ¹⁷⁴. Thus, LASHOR's goal was to convince the government that there was a demand for training in Russian, the primary language of communication among many families in Latvia. In that way, parents could access education decision-making. LASHOR defended minority language education by not sacrificing the Latvian language's education.

LASHOR's resistance actions positioned it in the category of overt resistance. Through protests outside of the Ministry of Education and the Latvian parliament, LASHOR publicly challenged the Latvian government's education policy changes, demonstrating the lack of communication with the Ministry of Education.

Russian-speaking parents

Russian-speaking parents had limited opportunities to express their resistance. Parents did not organize or initiate resistance activities by themselves rather than participating in the

¹⁷³ И., Пименов, "Реформа образования", interview by Яна Рубинчик, "Сегодня вечером", Rus.lsm.lv, 19 March 2019, <https://rus.lsm.lv/statja/novosti/politika/reforma-obrazovaniya--v-interesah-nacmeshinstv--ministerstvo.a313292/> (Accessed 27 July 2024).

¹⁷⁴ "Лашор Призывает Участвовать В Митинге У Стен Сейма 8-Го Февраля", *Лашор* [press release], 6 February 2018, http://www.lashor.lv/rus/news06_02_18.php (accessed 27 July 2024)

already established ones by LASHOR and RSL. Parents were not welcome to participate in spaces such as the Advisory Committee for National minorities, where they could provide feedback about how the education reform should be implemented. That is why in 2019, parents protested outside the Ministry of Education during one of the Committee's sessions since the Ministry refused to include representatives of children's parents on issues of education of national minorities ¹⁷⁵. The parents stood there "symbolically sealing their mouths with duct tape as a sign that they refused to listen to them ¹⁷⁶. Thus, while some parents participated in resistance activities under the protection umbrella of RSL, other parents chose a more indirect way of resisting.

After the education policy changes in 2018, Russian-speaking parents began enrolling their children in Russian secondary online schools ¹⁷⁷. Replacing the traditional minority language education at bilingual schools, these online schools became the alternative option for many parents who wished their children to be educated in Russian. Many parents even shared their experiences on social media, urging other parents to do the same since the Ministry of Education ignores them and blocks them from reforming a student-oriented education that will serve all students. For example, the parent wrote on her Facebook account how satisfied was with the Russian online school, giving tips and advice to other parents on how to detour the Latvian authorities and do the same:

¹⁷⁵ "Под протесты: Совет по делам нацменьшинств собрался после долгого перерыва", *Rus.lsm.lv*, 9 October 2019, <https://rus.lsm.lv/statja/novosti/politika/pod-protesti-sovet-po-delam-nacmenshinstv-sobraljsja-posle-dolgogo-pereriva.a334605/> (Accessed 9 July 2024).

¹⁷⁶ "Под протесты", 9 October 2019.

¹⁷⁷ "Прощай, латвийская школа: опыт рижанки, которая перевела дочь на онлайн-обучение в Россию", *Baltnews*, 5 August 2021, <https://lv.baltnews.com/school-Russian/20210805/1024998647/Proschay-latviyskaya-shkola-opyt-rizhanki-kotoraya-perevela-doch-na-onlayn-obuchenie-v-Rossiyu.html> (Accessed 27 July 2024).

“Goodbye to the Latvian education system. We will never return to you again. For those who are afraid of social services, the child is obliged to study at school by law. In which school is chosen by the parents. The enrollment certificate from the school solves all the problems”¹⁷⁸.

Therefore, it is evident that the parents’ exclusion from education decision-making led to covert resistance strategies.

Russian-speaking parents’ resistance actions can be classified as covert resistance actions since their participation in protests was indirectly hiding behind the protection of political parties and organizations. Besides that, the parents’ actions, such as the transfer of kids to online schools from Russia, are noticeable as covert resistance because they are a form of resistance against a policy which promotes their forced assimilation, so in that way, they oppose only the education policy, not all the government’s decisions.

Parents’ resistance strategies can also be understood through Dahlgren’s civic circuit. Russian-speaking parents do not have public spaces where they can openly discuss with each other and develop their views on minority education and education policymaking in general. As Dahlgren pointed out, citizens in a democratic society need to have access to communicative spaces to engage politically and, at the same, feel that these spaces of interaction are close to them¹⁷⁹. However, the lack of them possibly is rooted in what Cianetti pointed out as ethnic and technocratic hollowness in Latvia’s democratic institutions. The technocratic character of the Latvian institutions stemmed from the country’s elite-driven approach to policymaking, prioritizing developing a technocratic

¹⁷⁸ “Прощай, латвийская школа”, 5 August 2021.

¹⁷⁹ Dahlgren, *Media and Political Engagement*, p.114-115.

version of democracy¹⁸⁰. These technical practices of governing limited the public spaces in Latvia, where people could develop democratic debates and express their contestation of governmental policies. The ethnic hollowness supplemented the technocratic one by restricting the democratic space of minority groups due to their ethnicity¹⁸¹. Therefore, it is evident that the Russian-speaking parents were excluded from public places where they could express their resistance towards the policy changes due to the technocratic nature of Latvia's policymaking and the exclusion based on ethnic identity that goes with it.

Human Rights Advocates

Human rights defenders could neither develop resistance strategies nor participate in resistance actions against the educational amendments of 2018. They had limited space to express publicly their resistance and advocate for Russophone children's education rights due to the fear of stigmatization and persecution from the State Security police. A characteristic example was the arrest of V. Linderman, a journalist and human rights advocate, who spoke out against the elimination of education in the Russian language in a parent's meeting organized by RSL¹⁸². Due to his speech, one month later, he was arrested by the State security police under the suspicion that his words incited national hatred, indicating actions directed against the state independence of Latvia, territorial integrity and state power¹⁸³. However, Linderman is not the single case. According to Professor A. Gaponenko from the University of Latvia, in 2008, the state security police began putting pressure on members of the Russian-speaking community who publicly

¹⁸⁰ Cianetti, "Consolidated technocratic and ethnic hollowness, but no backsliding, p. 318,

¹⁸¹ Cianetti, "Consolidated technocratic and ethnic hollowness, but no backsliding", p.318.

¹⁸² "Линдермана освободили из-под ареста", *Delfi*, 21 May 2018, <https://rus.delfi.lv/57860/latvia/50050023/lindermana-osvobodili-iz-pod-aresta> (Accessed 27 July 2024).

¹⁸³ "Линдермана освободили из-под ареста", 21 May 2018.

defended Russian speakers' minority rights¹⁸⁴. He explained that the state security police was an organ for “working to discredit activists, created problems at their place of work and study, intimidated them, and initiated administrative and judicial proceedings against them on fabricated cases¹⁸⁵”. He was also arrested after discussing in a radio interview the Russian-speaking actors' resistance actions, such as litigations and meetings.

Besides persecution, human rights defenders struggled to express openly their opposition to governmental policies due to the State security's stigmatization practices. The most effective practice was the state security's annual report. In these reports, human rights defenders were portrayed as “Kremlin puppets” rather than defenders of the Russian-speaking community's interests in Latvia¹⁸⁶. The content of these reports was distributed in the Latvian media, shaping the image of the human rights defenders as “enemies of the Latvian state¹⁸⁷”. Although they attempted to challenge the practice of stigmatization by the security police in court, they were unsuccessful¹⁸⁸. Thus, these practices of persecution and stigmatization executed by state security explained why human rights defenders did not participate in resistance strategies or initiate a few of them.

¹⁸⁴ А., Гапоненко, “Институциональное преследование русских правозащитников в Латвии”, *Совет общественных организаций Латвии* [Web blog], 13 August 2020, <https://www.sool.lv/aleksandr-gaponenko-institutsionalnoe-presledovanie-russkih-pravozaschitnikov-v-latvii/> (Accessed 27 July 2024).

¹⁸⁵ Гапоненко, “Институциональное преследование русских правозащитников в Латвии”, 13 August 2020.

¹⁸⁶ Гапоненко, “Институциональное преследование русских правозащитников в Латвии”, 13 August 2020.

¹⁸⁷ Гапоненко, “Институциональное преследование русских правозащитников в Латвии”, 13 August 2020.

¹⁸⁸ Гапоненко, “Институциональное преследование русских правозащитников в Латвии”, 13 August 2020.

The type of resistance that can describe their strategy is unwitting resistance. The human rights defenders' few resistant actions fall under this category since they are recognized as resistant by their targets, the Latvian state, the state security and the public, but not by the defenders. The difference between the other two types of resistance mentioned so far is that the Latvian authorities consider the nature of these actions "dangerous" even if they are not. Therefore, what the human rights defenders perceived as a normal reaction towards an education policy targeting the assimilation of Russian-speaking children, the Latvian state viewed it as a "security threat" that needed to be minimized.

There is a possibility here that by framing Russophone human rights defenders as "Kremlin puppets", the Latvian state attempted to disable their ability to be heard and demand their political engagement in discussions of education policymaking. Russia's aggressive behaviour towards other states helped the Latvian authorities' efforts in this scenario. As Brubaker supports in his triadic model, the continuous interactions and monitoring between the nation-state, the external homeland and the national minority impact how the three actors react to each other ¹⁸⁹. Thus, when Russia, as the Russian speakers' external homeland, becomes aggressive to other countries, then the nation-state Latvia has the "excuse" to connect the minority's actions with Russia's aggressiveness, frame them as "aggressive" and "dangerous" for the security of the nation-state. In that way, the human rights defenders lose their credibility; they cannot be taken seriously. If one looks at Brubaker's model the other way around and puts in the position of the nation-state, the Russian-speaking human rights defenders, they do not have to be "Kremlin's puppets" to be considered like that if the Latvian state "feels" them like that ¹⁹⁰.

¹⁸⁹ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p.68.

¹⁹⁰ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p. 63.

School directors and teachers

The school staff felt intimidated to express their opinion or opposition to the policy amendments to minority education. The fear of stigmatization discouraged the school directors, teachers, and other school staff from participating in resistance activities against the reform. One of the school directors characteristically said, “We do not want to be immediately branded with shame by one side and raised to the banner of struggle by the other.¹⁹¹” School principals and teachers were intimidated by the persecution that the human rights defenders had suffered and afraid that they would lose their jobs; they did not participate in resistance acts or express any kind of public opinion against the reform. Therefore, fear and intimidation prevailed among the school staff every time they considered joining resistance acts, fearing the governmental repercussions that their involvement would have. That is why they do not belong in any type of resistance, because they did not join one.

The types of resistance that the Russian-speaking mesolevel actors embraced from 2018 to 2022 to resist the education amendments demonstrated a sense of ambivalence among Russian-speaking actors. It illustrated what Dahlgren talked about political disengagement, that even if Russian speakers wanted to participate in resistance acts, their motive and the problematic circumstances made it impossible for them¹⁹². Despite their common goal, the actors’ resistance strategies or the lack thereof, illustrated how much negative sentiments are circulated on the issue of minority education for Russian speakers in Latvia. For example, Harmony’s discreet approach in resisting the education amendments for minority language education and the human rights defenders and school

¹⁹¹ “ «А пошли вы все!» Языковая реформа школ глазами подростков и школьного психолога”, *Grani.lv*, 15 February 2018, <https://www.grani.lv/latvia/92746-a-poshli-vy-vse-yazykovaya-reforma-shkol-glazami-podrostkov-i-shkolnogo-psihologa.html#cmtblock> (Accessed 27 July 2024).

¹⁹² Dahlgren, *Media and Political Engagement*, p.82.

staff fear of “getting red-handed” indicated that defending the Russian-speaking children’s education rights is considered something bad. That is why many human rights defenders were persecuted. Thus, regarding human rights, specifically minority rights, the Latvian democratic institutions’ notion of technocratic governance dominates.

To sum up, by examining the Russian-speaking actors’ resistance strategies and types of resistance during this period, it was revealed that their resistance was expressed on a small scale due to the low quality of the Latvian democratic institutions. The review of the news pieces from 2018-2022 showed the lack of characteristics that Dahlgren had mentioned as fundamental for establishing a civil democratic society¹⁹³. Latvian institutions do not have spaces for minority groups to advocate their rights. In addition to that, human rights defenders are persecuted or intimidated by the state authorities. The rest of the Russian-speaking actors are discouraged from defending the protection of minority rights because they are afraid of the consequences of their advocacy in their jobs. These are signs of a society favouring corporate values such as efficiency over democratic debates and constructive discussions in decision-making. As it is visible, this technocratic approach has minimized human rights values and, more importantly, democratic values in the Latvian society.

6.2 The transition from resistance to political disengagement: A shift in dynamics from 2022-2023

Pro-minority political parties

The pro-minority political parties Russian Union of Latvia (RSL) and Harmony (Saskenas) did not express any significant resistance after the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian War. RSL’s members participated in a few covert activities that LASHOR

¹⁹³ Dahlgren, *Media and Political Engagement*, p.114.

organized to oppose the changes in minority language education¹⁹⁴. However, its reputation as a pro-Russian political party after the War negatively influenced its ability to develop resistance. To be more specific, RSL, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, received a warning from the state security Police about its activities and their role in disseminating the Kremlin propaganda through its social media channels¹⁹⁵. The General's prosecution office stated that another attempt to disinform the Russian-speaking population in Latvia would be considered a cause for its closure under the law on political parties¹⁹⁶. Therefore, RSL's strong connections to Russia make it unsuitable to oppose the education reform and protect the education rights of Russophone children.

Harmony, a moderate political party, did not resist the education policy changes because it had dissolved after the parliamentary elections of October 2022. Traditionally, it had the majority of votes in the Latvian parliament (Saeima), as shown in the 2018 election results, where it gathered 20% of the votes¹⁹⁷. However, due to the ambiguity caused by the War in Ukraine and the subsequent legislation amendments, the party did not enter the parliament after gathering only 4.8% of the votes, marking the first time it was left

¹⁹⁴Дорофеев, В., “Сегодняшний пикет против запрета русским детям Латвии учиться на родном языке поддержало присутствием около 25 человек”, *Совет общественных организаций Латвии* [Web blog], 26 October 2023, <https://www.sool.lv/segodnyashnij-piket-parlamenta-protiv-zapreta-russkim-detyam-latvii-uchitsya-na-rodnom-yazyke-podderzhalo-prisutstviem-okolo-25-chelovek/> (Accessed 28 July 2024).

¹⁹⁵ “Zvirbulis, G., “Русский союз Латвии предупрежден о будущем поведении”, LTV, 17 March 2023, <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/politics/politics/17.03.2023-ltv-latvian-russian-union-warned-about-future-conduct.a501292/> (Accessed 28 July 2024).

¹⁹⁶ Zvirbulis, “Русский союз Латвии предупрежден о будущем поведении”, 17 March 2023.

¹⁹⁷ Результаты выборов XIII Сейма, *Rus.lsm.lv*, [Website], <https://rus.lsm.lv/itogi-viborov-seyma-2018-goda/> (Accessed 9 August 2024).

out¹⁹⁸. The pressure of the War wore down on the party, and the legislation changes made it impossible for it to actively participate in expressing resistance¹⁹⁹. Therefore, it is clear that pro-minority parties were not active in resistance after the War and did not employ any resistance strategies or types of resistance.

School teachers and directors

After the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian war, Russian-speaking teachers and directors continued feeling excluded from having a say in education decision-making. This feeling of being unable to influence policies directly impacting them led the head of the education workers' union to support stopping pickets and marches since politicians cannot find solutions to their pressing problems²⁰⁰. People began realizing that the Latvian government turned a deaf ear to their demands of politically engaging in education policy discussions. This realization gave them a critical eye for the government. When people said that they will stop expressing their resistance against anti-minority policies because they have become cynical that their efforts do not have an impact, the characteristics of

¹⁹⁸ “Не сдаемся и продолжаем работать дальше, чтобы вернуть доверие”, *Rus.lsm.lv*, 2 October 2022, <https://rus.lsm.lv/statja/novosti/politika/ne-sdaemsja-i-prodolzhaem-rabotat-dalshe-chtobi-vernuto-doverie--predsedatel-pravlenija-soglasija.a476216/> (Accessed 29 July 2024).

¹⁹⁹ “Harmony will have to dissolve itself if its ideas are not in demand in the next elections”, *Rus.lsm.lv*, 7 October 2022, <https://rus.lsm.lv/statja/novosti/analitika/soglasiyu-pridetsja-samoraspustitsja-esli-ego-idei-ne-budut-vostrebovani-na-sleduyuschih-viborah--deputat-lochmele.a477067/> (Accessed 29 July 2024).

²⁰⁰ “Власти должны услышать: осенью латвийские учителя проведут бессрочную забастовку”, *Baltnews*, 25 June 2022, https://lv.baltnews.com/News_Latvia/20220625/1025695090/Vlasti-dolzheny-uslyshat-osenyu-latviyskie-uchitelya-provedut-bessrochnuyu-zabastovku.html (Accessed 28 July 2024).

what Dahlgren named as political disengagement are visible. Political disengagement is a conscious political act. People choose to embrace a disengaged stance when they sense that their country's political system does not provide them with the necessary means for meaningful participation²⁰¹. That is what the school teachers and directors decided to do after 2022.

The school staff in Latvia has passed all the stages of political disengagement. People have resigned from expressing significant resistance to the abolition of bilingual education since they felt that the current political system could not let them participate. This means that the political elites in Latvia have immense power in deciding who has political rights in the Latvian society. For the Latvian political elites, Russian-speaking people do not have political rights, which is why they are not responding to their request to join political discussions about education and thus making the Russian-speaking mesolevel actors feel powerless. For instance, the school director of the 3rd Riga State Gymnasium, Andris Priekulis, referred to the role that the political elites of the state played in the formation of the education policies:

“The question of what languages children should learn should be decided by the parents and the students and not by politicians and other officials. It is bad that emotions play a big role in discussing and deciding such issues²⁰².”

The government's nonresponse to the school staff's demands led to a different resistance approach. People began developing resistance strategies not to defend the education right to teach in the native language of the minority but to address the lack of preparedness in the education system towards the challenges that the education reform brought. People

²⁰¹ Dahlgren, *Media and Political Engagement*, p. 82.

²⁰² А., Александрова, “Школы нацменьшинств в Латвии”, *Совет общественных организаций Латвии* [Web blog], 11 February 2023, <https://www.sool.lv/shkoly-natsmeshinstv-v-latvii-alla-aleksandrova/> (Accessed 28 July 2024).

began pointing out the negative consequences of not having a long-term strategic plan to manage education²⁰³. They highlighted the lack of consistency in education reforms and legislation in ministers of education.²⁰⁴ Apart from that, they pointed out the massive surveillance and intervention in education that the Latvian State does through the strict legislation and the sudden and constant inspections at bilingual schools as an attempt to intimidate both the school staff and children to follow the new rules of monolingual education²⁰⁵. Characteristic here are the extreme examples that teachers and directors mentioned about punishing and intimidating children for speaking Russian between them, even during school breaks.

“During an inspection by the state education quality service at her school, Russian speaking children were not allowed to speak between them in their mother tongue. There is no such practice in any country in the world. Why can they not speak their language?²⁰⁶”

²⁰³ Д., Ключкин, “Легко не будет! Директора школ о переходе на латышский язык обучения”, interview by Ольга Князева, *Открытый разговор*, ЛР4,, 31 August 2023, <https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=uo-2F9yYH3A> (Accessed 28 July 2024).

²⁰⁴ Е., Ведищева, “Легко не будет! Директора школ о переходе на латышский язык обучения”, interview by Ольга Князева, *Открытый разговор*, ЛР4,, 31 August 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uo-2F9yYH3A> (Accessed 28 July 2024).

²⁰⁵ А., Сметрович, “Переход детсадов на латышский” - что нас ждёт? interview by Ольга Князева, *Открытый разговор*, ЛР4, 3 August 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KFuPb2KRplc> (Accessed 28 July 2024).

²⁰⁶ Сметрович, “Открытый разговор”, 3 August 2023.

The director of the preschool educational institution expressed her resistance to

“Let them speak what language they speak. Our task is to show that look, this is our language, this is Latvian, we love to watch this and that, this is our culture and traditions. In that way, we can support the learning of the language²⁰⁷”.

Lastly, she mentioned that for the state's quality service, the inspection regulations say that it is problematic for Russian-speaking children to speak Russian at school between them²⁰⁸. Thus, it is visible that the Latvian State continued even more after the war in Ukraine its intimidation practices towards children, teachers and any other staff involved in schools.

School teachers expressed their last card of resistance to the education reform of 2022 by going on an indefinite strike²⁰⁹. This move describes another stage of political disengagement, ambivalence. In the ambivalence stage, people are usually partially involved in political activities. However, their motivation to continue is not strong enough to overcome the reluctance to get involved. At the same time, if there is motivation, it is dampened by a feeling that the necessary efforts to participate are just too much²¹⁰. From being passive in 2018, the teachers' strike indicated some political involvement in resisting the 2022 reform before the school started in September 2023. The picket's demands included a balanced workload, a salary increase schedule based on the principles set out in the Education Law, and a fair mechanism for distributing funds²¹¹.

²⁰⁷ Сметрович, “Открытый разговор”, 3 August 2023.

²⁰⁸ Сметрович, “Открытый разговор”, 3 August 2023.

²⁰⁹ “Власти должны услышать”, 25 June 2022.

²¹⁰ Dalhgren, Media and political engagement, p.82.

²¹¹ “Власти должны услышать”, 25 June 2022.

Nevertheless, their motivation was insufficient to preserve the resistance efforts since the energy necessary for them was insufficient. Most available teachers were of retirement age, and the younger ones either chose another profession or moved to teach in the private sector²¹². Hence, the teachers' resistance also lacked people.

Besides people, the teachers' resistance also lacked trust towards the Latvian institutions. Distrust is a common characteristic among politically disengaged groups. Dahlgren argued that, by expressing their distrust, people negatively criticize their government's administration²¹³. The Russian-speaking teachers lost their faith in the Latvian state's motivation to protect the Russophone children's education rights. Their disbelief towards the state grew even more after the publication of the Council of Europe advisory Committee's opinion on applying the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) and the Latvian state's response to it. The Committee acknowledged Latvia's security concerns after the Russian invasion of Ukraine²¹⁴. Nevertheless, it disapproved of the government's discourse on equating the actions of the Russian Federation with the ones of the Russophone minority since that could lead to unjust limitations on its ability to exercise minority rights as safeguarded by the Framework Convention²¹⁵. The Latvian state responded by emphasizing the weaknesses

²¹² Е., Ведищева, "Учителя меньшинственных школ стесняются своего латышского", interview by Евгений Антонов, *Подробности*, Rus.lsm.lv, 8 June 2022, <https://rus.lsm.lv/statja/novosti/analitika/uchitelja-menshinstvennih-shkol-stesnjayutsja-svoego-latishskogo--pedagog.a460479/> (Accessed 28 July 24).

²¹³ Dahlgren, *Media and political engagement*, p.82.

²¹⁴ Council of Europe, European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), *opinion on the recent amendments to the legislation on education in minority languages*, Venice: Council of Europe, ACFC/OP/IV(2023)1, p. 4.

²¹⁵ Council of Europe, European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), *opinion on the recent amendments to the legislation on education in minority languages*, Venice: Council of Europe, ACFC/OP/IV(2023)1, p.4-5.

of the bilingual system in offering proficient Latvian language skills to the children and their opposition to the Committee's suggestions referring to the inability of the latter to understand the historical importance of the Latvian language²¹⁶.

Viewing the abovementioned, the Russian-speaking teachers adopted a cynical attitude towards resistance. According to one of them,

“Is a regression in the field of protecting the rights of national minorities - all international norms become empty words. This is upsetting. In my opinion, there is no longer any need to protect the rights of national minorities in Latvian courts. Because the process turns out to be purely formal²¹⁷.”

From the above segment, it is clear that after 2022, school teachers and directors have chosen to distance themselves from resistance activities and express their dissatisfaction only by focusing on the negative consequences of education implementation²¹⁸.

Human rights defenders

²¹⁶ Council of Europe, European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), opinion on the recent amendments to the legislation on education in minority languages, Venice: Council of Europe, ACFC/OP/IV(2023)1, p.4

²¹⁷ Е., Кривцова, “Еще рано списывать русские школы: правозащитник о последнем шансе”, *Совет общественных организаций Латвии* [Web blog], 11 February 2023, <https://www.sool.lv/eshhe-rano-spisyvat-russkie-shkoly-pravozashhitnik-o-poslednem-shanse/> (Accessed 28 July 2024).

²¹⁸ Е., Ведищева, “Подробности” 8 June 2022.

Human rights defenders did not oppose the education reform of 2022 due to the environment of fear and intimidation that kept building up since 2018. Russophone human rights defenders, publicists and activists continued being persecuted after 2022 and with more intensity after the War in Ukraine²¹⁹. Specifically, human rights defenders were thrown into prison and deprived of the right to express their opinions freely. For instance, one of the human rights activists mentioned that

“Everyone who is dissatisfied is made to understand - keep quiet, and if you open your mouth, you will go to prison. Those to whom these signals are addressed read them perfectly - many, out of harm’s way, stop “seditious” speeches on social networks, and some even prepare their suitcases for departure²²⁰.”

Thus, those human rights defenders who could publicly express their resistance against the reform or mobilize Russian speakers to organize resistance activities stopped having access to spaces of communication and interaction with other Russian speakers.

It is evident that the Latvian government put much effort into making a connection between Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the rights of the Russian-speaking human rights defenders to advocate for children’s education in their native language²²¹. To be more explicit, by following Brubaker’s triadic model, the government monitoring the

²¹⁹ А., Березовская, “Тюрьма или эмиграция – удел русского активиста в Прибалтике”, *Совет общественных организаций Латвии* [Web blog], 21 October 2022, <https://www.sool.lv/tyurma-ili-emigratsija-udel-russkogo-aktivista-v-pribaltike/> (Accessed 28 July 2024).

²²⁰ А., Березовская, “Тюрьма или эмиграция, 21 October 2022.

²²¹ АСFC/ОP/IV(2023)1, p.4.

aggressive behaviour of Russia became stricter with the freedoms given to the Russian-speaking minority in education and spaces of interaction between the members of the minority ²²². The surprising element is that Brubaker's model is incomplete in this part. Because the government restricted their freedoms and abolished bilingual education, Russian speakers normally would resist; however, in this period, in conjunction with the War in Ukraine and the fear of persecution, human rights advocates decided to politically disengage from resisting the education reform. The best phrase that describes this political distance is by another human rights activist: "The Russians need to know their place. Moreover, where this place is, everyone understands it perfectly. To put it mildly, in the corner, facing the wall²²³."

The political disengagement of the human rights defenders applies Dahlgren's attitudes of resignation and indifference²²⁴. People lost interest in participating in protests or any other form of resistance. As one of the human rights defenders who participated in one of the few protests against the education reform argued,

"There were a minority of ordinary people who did not sit on the couch. Either people did not understand the message, or they were working, or the November rain and snow got in the way. As always ²²⁵."

Most people who participated in the few protests organized were from the political party RSL²²⁶. The rest of the Russian speakers chose to resign from resistance efforts, knowing

²²² Brubaker, R. Nationalism Reframed, p. 68.

²²³ Дорофеев, В., "Сегодняшний пикет против запрета русским детям Латвии", 26 October 2023.

²²⁴ Dahlgren, media and political engagement, p.82.

²²⁵ Дорофеев, В., "Сегодняшний пикет против запрета русским детям Латвии учиться на родном языке", 26 October 2023.

²²⁶ Дорофеев, В., "Сегодняшний пикет против запрета русским детям Латвии учиться на

that those would not have an impact on changing the education policy and making it more minority friendly. That is why, in the end, the human rights defenders who went to the protest said: “Will this picket achieve anything? Probably not. Why did I come then? It was just a shame not to come. That is probably all²²⁷.” Thus, Russian speakers became politically apathetic.

That is why, after 2022, we cannot identify a specific type of resistance because there is not any. Russian-speaking journalists, publicists, academics, and human rights defenders are being subjected to different kinds of intimidating methods from the government and the state security police, so they are discouraged from resisting and publicly debating and contesting the government’s education policy²²⁸. The intimidation and pressure of the Latvian government is massive on the Russian-speaking activists. This pressure and intimidation hindered the development of resistance strategies, at least the forms of resistance publicly visible to the Russian-speaking media. The Russian invasion of Ukraine came and put more pressure on this intimidation from the Latvian government, making people not want to resist at all. The War functioned for the government as a pretext to implement and restrict even more the rights of the minority by abolishing minority language education.

Latvian Association for the Protection of Russian Schools (LASHOR)

LASHOR was the only Russian-speaking mesolevel actor who continued resisting the education amendments after 2022. However, the Russo-Ukrainian War changed its resistance strategies. LASHOR followed like the pro-minority political party “Harmony” back in 2018, the legal path of resistance. The president of LASHOR, Igor Pimenov,

родном языке”, 26 October 2023.

²²⁷ Дорофеев, В, “Сегодняшний пикет против запрета русским детям Латвии учиться на родном языке”, 26 October 2023.

²²⁸ А., Александрова, “Школы нацменьшинств в Латвии”, 11 February 2023.

began urging parents to cooperate and seek assistance from the Latvian Constitutional Court and international organizations. Characteristically, he supported that

“Use all the opportunities provided by Latvian laws. We stand in solidarity with the parents challenging the total Latvianization of school education in the Constitutional Court. We reserve the right to seek support for our demands from the embassies of the European Union states, other world democracies, the European Court of Human Rights and international organizations²²⁹.”

Therefore, as the next section of the analysis will demonstrate, Russian-speaking parents did not wish to attract too much public attention and desired to blend in with the rest of the Latvian-speaking citizens. LASHOR started suggesting legal resistance as an alternative, more subtle form of resistance.

The change of resistance strategies from the LASHOR is possibly related to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and how openly Russian-speaking actors can defend the minority rights of Russian speakers after that. The president of LASHOR, after the War, expressed his concern that the negative sentiments of the government toward Russia would be transferred to Russian-speaking people in Latvia²³⁰. If one investigates Brubaker’s nexus model Mr. Pimenov’s concerns turned out to be true. The Latvian government seems to

²²⁹ “Заявление ЛАШОР о прекращении дошкольного и общего образования на русском языке”, *Лауор* [press release], 15 August 2023, http://www.lashor.lv/rus/Zajavlenie_LAShOR_o_prekrashhenii_doshkolnogo_i_obshhego_obrazovaniija_na_russkom_jazyke.php (Accessible 28 July 2024).

²³⁰ И., Пименов, “Русский язык: быть ли ему в Латвии?”, interview by Ольга князева, *Открытый разговор*, 6 April 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i22CXN2wnmU> (Accessed 28 July 2024).

be using the Russian invasion of Ukraine to frame Russian-speaking education as dangerous and harmful to national security. Thus, it eliminates Russian-speaking education. As Brubaker said, one of the three actors of the nexus model does not have to be or have a specific attitude per se if the other actors think they have²³¹. Therefore, LASHOR's resistance acts of defending Russian education do not need to be dangerous per se if the Latvian government thinks it that way. According to the president of the association, Mr. Pimenov,

“The application of the principle of collective guilt comes into conflict with the foundations of democracy. The Russian-speaking residents of Latvia are not and cannot be collectively guilty, just as there cannot be any guilt for any Latvian until proven in court. It is immoral to use the War in Ukraine to justify restrictions on their rights and opportunities²³²”.

Thus, the resistance strategy changes that LASHOR did and its indirect resistance as a mesolevel actor can be attributed to the government's efforts to utilize the War as a tool to restrict and minimize even more communicative spaces and rights of Russophone mesolevel actors to defend minority education rights.

That said, LASHOR transitioned from overt to covert resistance, a strategic shift towards a more subtle form of opposition that is discernible only to the public and the actor. The association president, Mr. Pimenov, explained why the government attempted to hinder the participation of Russian-speaking actors in policymaking spaces, reaffirming Cianetti's notion of Latvia's technocratic hollowness. For Mr. Pimenov:

²³¹ Brubaker, Nationalism reframed, p.63-64.

²³² ПИМЕНОВ, И., “Открытый разговор”, 6 April 2023.

“There was a multicultural movement in education that found obstacles to growth due to the nationalist political direction of Latvian state politics. Many of the Latvian population sufficiently support this direction due to how the Latvian Ethnos and state were established. At some point, xenophobia became a jump board for a lot of today’s politicians who are in governance. Specifically, the state policy acted timidly and allowed the nationalist’s politics every time before the elections, exacerbating this question among multiethnic relations to achieve success²³³.”

Thus, having this nationalistic perspective, the government’s institutions started being anti-democratic when viewing who is Russian or not or who speaks the language²³⁴. The Russian invasion of Ukraine put the tombstone on defending Russian-speaking minority rights since nationalist politicians use the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the impression that aggression makes on society as a pretext for eliminating general education in the Russian language. Mr. Pimenov recognized that the War in Ukraine had worsened the opportunity to protect the rights of those citizens of the Latvian Republic who speak Russian in the house²³⁵. Therefore, as a president of LASHOR, along with its members, tried to push for covert resistance strategies in courts, where resistance can still be recognized as such to provoke policy change but without the whole negative sentiments that the government is trying to put on the Russian speaking minority. People view everybody who tries to protect the minority’s linguistic rights as an enemy of the Latvian language²³⁶.

²³³ Пименов, “Открытый разговор”, 6 April 2023.

²³⁴ Пименов, “Открытый разговор”, 6 April 2023.

²³⁵ Пименов, “Открытый разговор”, 6 April 2023.

²³⁶ Пименов, “Открытый разговор”, 6 April 2023.

Russian-speaking parents

Russian-speaking parents, just like the schoolteachers and directors, did not express their resistance towards the education reform but towards the poor implementation of it. There is little data on parents participating in resistance activities, which possibly had to do with the fact that people gave up, were disappointed by the lack of attention to their needs from the Latvian government and were trying to re-enter the Latvian society by assimilating into it. As one of the parents from Daugavpils, a town with traditionally a significant percentage of Russian speakers, said that

“Latvia is a small nation with a small language, and it must strengthen its language. We all switched to Russian self-study. We want to return to normal life. It is essential to feel "Latvians" all of us²³⁷.”

Parents and the rest of the Russian-speaking mesolevel actors were intimidated to express their opinion because the War began and changed the position they had in society. They tried to maintain a low profile and keep their ethnic identity as an element that must be concealed in their private life. Hence, they attempted to blend in with the titular population and consequently they accepted the abolition of the bilingual school for their kids. As one mother said:

"It is better to have a school with quality education than to divide schools and society. If a school with quality

²³⁷ И., Вагель, “Даугавпилс и латышский язык”, interview by Алена Борисова, *ТЧК*, Rus.lsm.lv, 30 August 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKkMmaPiFNQ> (Accessed 28 July 2024).

education existed and the teachers were prepared in 20 years, the problem would disappear²³⁸."

Thus, Russian-speaking parents have accepted the education amendments after 2022. They did not want to resist the governmental policy due to the challenging circumstances surrounding the War in Ukraine and the disappointment that any resistance would be ineffective and futile. As a result, Russian-speaking parents, too, do not belong to any type of resistance.

To sum up, Russian-speaking mesolevel actors, after the War in Ukraine, succumbed to the accumulated sentiments of disappointment and cynicism that had already existed since 2018 but now led to their political disengagement. They actively chose to politically distance themselves from engaging in resistance activities or organizing them since the geopolitical circumstances, in conjunction with the powerlessness they felt about the impact of their actions, found them unable to defend the education right of Russian-speaking children to learn in their native language. Only LASHOR continued indirectly through legal means and attempted to resist by highlighting the rights that the minority has as citizens of the country. Also, their types of resistance, if any, converted from overt to covert resistance due to the Latvian government's attempts to connect the Russian-speaking minority with the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Summary of the analysis

In this chapter, the study demonstrated the resistance strategies of Russian-speaking mesolevel actors before and during the Russo-Ukrainian War. Specifically, it identified the resistance types used by the Russian-speaking actors to express their resistance. Through the comparison of the resistance acts before and during the War, it was evident

²³⁸ Квальчук Л, "Открытый разговор", 3 August 2023.

that there were changes in the Russian speakers' engagement in resistance. Before 2022, the Russian-speaking mesolevel actors had built a small but active resistance base to perform their activities, and their resistance acts belonged to the overt, covert and unwitting types of resistance. After 2022, the small resistance base was eradicated since the Latvian government managed to equate Russian speakers' image with that of aggressive Russia, negatively charging the Latvian-speaking part of the society towards them. That affected the level of political engagement of the mesolevel actors in resistance against the education policy changes and, consequently, the performance of resistance acts. The strategic framing of the government of Russian-speaking resistance as "aggressive and dangerous" changes the actors' resistance type into a covert one. Apart from that, the lack of political engagement increased too. Even though they supported the acts of resistance through the hidden character that the covert resistance offered them, they no longer had the courage to join the resistant acts or care about education policymaking. They have adopted a cynical approach, expressed their disappointment and distrust of governmental institutions or said that the resistance acts will not change anything, thus it is not worth fighting them.

7. Concluding Discussion and summing up

This thesis aimed to explore how the Russian-speaking actors at the mesolevel expressed their resistance to the changes in minority education policy before and during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The study delved into the historical and political relationship between Russia and Latvia to understand the emergence of minority rights in Latvia and the factors contributing to their formation. It also examined the education amendments adopted by Latvia from 2003 to 2004 and the reaction of the minority to gain contextual understanding.

The study also reviewed existing scholarly works on the demobilization of Russian speakers

after the War and the role of democratic institutions to explain the thesis's contribution to human rights scholarship. The study's theoretical framework was drawn from the works of Hollander and Einwohner, as well as Brubaker and Dahlgren. Hollander's and Einwohner's work helped examine the actors' resistance strategies during the studied period and identify the type of resistance to which their strategies belonged. Brubaker's triadic nexus model analyzed the relationship between Latvia as a nation-state, Russia as an external homeland and Russian-speaking actors as the national minority. Dahlgren's civic circuit and ideas on political disengagement complemented Brubaker's model. The study employed systematic qualitative text analysis (QTA) as a research method to analyze the data collected from Russian-speaking media outlets in Latvia. In total, 89 news pieces were analyzed, with 40 from 2018-2022 and 49 from 2022-2023.

Based on the analysis results, I will share my conclusions by answering the research questions that were formulated at the beginning of the analysis:

How the Russian-speaking mesolevel actors expressed their resistance strategies related to minority education policy changes before and during the Russo-Ukrainian War?

Before 2022, Russian-speaking actors expressed their resistance to changes in minority education through protests, petitions, and legal actions. This included appealing to the Latvian constitutional court and the ECHR. Nevertheless, their ability to demonstrate the latter acts was constrained due to the limited civil spaces available for Russian speakers to advocate for their minority rights. As Dahlgren argued in his civic circuit, civic spaces are essential to democratic societies, where citizens can exchange views, organize towards a common goal, and access public debates about policymaking. Besides the limited spaces, the actors were afraid to advocate against the education changes due to the state security Police's intimidation tactics. Human rights defenders were arrested or persecuted in court when they publicly defended education in minority languages. When the other Russophone actors viewed the stigmatization of the defenders, they were discouraged from initiating or participating in resistance activities, fearing the repercussions their participation would have

in their jobs. Few were the Russian-speaking actors who ardently expressed their resistance despite the difficult circumstances. Those actors were the pro-minority political parties Harmony, the Russian Union of Latvia (RSL), and LASHOR. The rest of the actors preferred not to engage in resistant actions or resisted more discreetly.

After 2022, there were no significant resistance actions against the education amendments. The fear and intimidation the actors had felt since 2018 transformed into cynicism and disappointment. Human rights defenders continued to be persecuted, and parents and school staff distanced themselves from resistance against the reforms. They accepted the fact that their resistance would not change anything. Only LASHOR continued to resist, but in a more limited way, by organizing a few protests outside the parliament. The school staff shifted their focus to resisting how the reform was implemented at schools rather than the reform per se. It is also worth noticing that the pro-minority political parties were overshadowed by the geopolitical circumstances surrounding the Russian-speaking minority. Both parties were left out of the parliament after the elections in October 2022, with the Harmony Party choosing to dissolve shortly after the elections. This resulted from the Latvian government's efforts to associate the Russian-speaking actors' resistance against monolingual education with Russia and its aggressiveness against Ukraine, which minimized the active resistant actors. The War became a preventative factor for them to distance themselves from resistance.

Moreover, there appears to be a link between access to human rights and the function of democratic institutions in Latvia. The resistance strategies of Russian-speaking actors revealed a deficiency within Latvia's democratic institutions. This deficiency stems from what Cianetti called "ethnic" and "technocratic" hollowness. The Latvian government pursued an elite-driven approach to policymaking that restricted the public spaces in which Russian-speaking actors could discuss and oppose minority education policies due to their ethnic background. This approach, which began with the country's accession to the European Union, is now evident in Latvia's human rights protection. Russian-speaking actors were dissuaded from participating in education policymaking during both periods analyzed in the thesis. This dissuasion raises the question of how human rights can be protected in Latvia if

those who need them cannot appeal to them, as their access to the decision-making processes that establish these rights is limited. This is a crucial question that needs to be answered – who do the human rights in Latvia belong to, and who can benefit from them?

What type of resistance the Russian-speaking mesolevel actors used to articulate their opposition to the minority education policies changes before and during the War?

In both the periods before and during the War, actors adopted three types of resistance: overt, covert, and unwitting. The expression of resistance acts under these three types revealed a strong connection between human rights protection in Latvia and the country's nation-building project after 1991, a project that significantly impacted the human rights landscape. The core of the project was to exclude Russian speakers from influencing political matters in the newly established country due to the traumatic experience of Soviet occupation. As a result, the Russophone population did not have access to the political and social life of the country. Although this nationalist notion had its roots in 1991, it still dominates how current policymakers form policies related to Russian-speakers.

This mentality of exclusion influences how human rights are upheld in Latvia and who they are intended to protect. For Russian speakers, the government did not create opportunities to discuss their rights or how governmental policies affect them, as these were not initially meant for Russian speakers. Consequently, the strategies of resistance employed by different groups varied based on the spaces available to them for expressing opposition and the level of tolerance shown by the Latvian government. The lack of communicative spaces, as described by Dahlgren in his civil circuit model, is a significant issue, particularly for Russian-speaking actors in Latvian society. The analysis showed that Russian-speaking actors do not have access to these public spaces as citizens, with only a few groups, such as pro-minority political parties and LASHOR, having limited access on a small scale. Therefore, it is evident that access to and protection of human rights are applicable in Latvia based on ethnic identity.

How did the resistance strategies of the Russian-speaking actors change from 2018-2022 and 2022 -2023?

During 2018-2022 and 2022-2023, changes were observed in the resistance strategies of certain actors. From 2018-2022, it was discovered that Russian-speaking actors, such as parents and human rights advocates, who were crucial for resisting the policy changes, showed little resistance due to the repressive measures imposed by the Latvian government. Their prevailing sentiments were stigmatization, fear, and intimidation, which led to their demobilization. They felt powerless, which resulted in political disengagement. They lacked the space for expression and motivation to resist and witnessed that resistance led to persecution or job-related issues, ultimately choosing to distance themselves from it.

Consequently, their behavioural resistance pattern exhibited signs of political disengagement, including resignation, indifference, and ambivalence. Political disengagement hampers the protection of human rights, as it deprives minority groups of the opportunity to advocate for their rights and protect their culture. Without people's advocacy, the protection of human rights becomes an elite domain where specific actors can decide who deserves protection under the human rights mandate and who does not.

Between 2022 and 2023, there was an increase in political disengagement, particularly due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The War in Ukraine itself is not the sole reason for the lack of resistance from minority actors. However, it has played a significant role in accelerating the process of assimilation and acceptance by the minority. According to Brubaker's triadic nexus model, the Russian invasion of Ukraine provided the government with more leverage to change its treatment of the minority. This included efforts by the government to link minority rights defenders with Russia in order to portray them as enemies of the state and puppets of the Kremlin.

Nevertheless, due to the War, Brubaker's model here is incomplete. Instead of observing the strong resistance of the Russophone actors, one could see that many preferred to remain silent

and not resist. Only LASHOR resisted through a few protests; there was not enough motivation to mobilize the people to attend the protests. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, one can see a shift in how Russian speakers viewed themselves concerning the titular nation. As Rönngren found out through her research, the Russian-speaking minority possibly experienced emotional confusion over Russia's invasion of another Slavic state since the majority of Russophones in Latvia were used to viewing their kinstate as a liberator and not an aggressor ²³⁹. This emotional confusion probably led them to accept the education policy changes more readily and abolish Russian-speaking education at schools. Thus, the actors did not push for more resistance actions since Russian speakers had begun shifting their identity to become more compatible with the Latvian one and not with their kinstate's Russia and be identified as aggressors.

Dahlgren explained that democratic societies rely on the knowledge and values people acquire to form an identity ²⁴⁰. The Latvian state recognized this and actively promoted the Latvian identity by emphasizing proficiency in the state language. This recognition potentially led parents, who are essential for resistance against education amendments, to relinquish their Russian-speaking identity by accepting the education changes. They understood that through monolingual education, their children could learn the values, gain knowledge of the Latvian identity, and assimilate. Therefore, they transitioned to the Latvian identity by leaving behind minority language education. Their desire to belong to the titular nation was more important to them than their motivation to resist and defend minority linguistic rights, which could align them with Russia, perceived as an aggressor state.

Regarding human rights, like many diverse societies, Latvia struggles to balance assimilation and integration. However, it often prioritizes assimilation over integration due to security concerns and geopolitical challenges. Human rights are meant to safeguard the cultural identity of minority groups and protect them from forced assimilation. These groups require

²³⁹ Rönngren, *Cancelling Russia*, p.24.

²⁴⁰ Dahlgren, *Media and Political Engagement*, p.119.

protection to preserve their unique cultures. Unfortunately, the constant interference of the political elite in education issues prevents those affected from having a say in matters that concern them. This hinders the protection of minority and children's rights, which is crucial as children and their parents should have the right to choose the best education for them.

Moreover, this study illustrated some limitations that are worth sharing. The study analyzed the resistance strategies of the Russian-speaking actors that were covered by the Russophone media of Latvia. Instead of conducting interviews with the Russian-speaking actors, I studied their resistance through textual analysis, which was a more practical research method for the time I spent writing the thesis. Also, I had free access to the data. Thus, conducting interviews would be impractical since a lot of preparation and time would be needed before and after, which I did not have due to the thesis timeframe. In addition, the analysis results were derived from Russian-speaking media sources in Latvia. I did not study the Latvian-speaking media outlets since I do not speak Latvian. To examine them, I would need to hire a translator, which would be time and money-consuming for a small project such as the thesis. That is why I took advantage of my fluency in Russian to study the Russophone news pieces. Also, due to the study's aim to explore Russian-speaking actors' resistance strategies, it would be better to study media outlets where the actors felt comfortable expressing their resistance openly. Therefore, I chose media sources that were closer to the Russian-speaking mesolevel actors.

This thesis could make a significant contribution to the improvement of human rights protection in Latvia. The study involves a comparison of the resistance strategies of the Russophone community during two different periods. By comparing the resistance of Russophones against anti-minority policies before and during the Russian invasion of Ukraine, one can understand the level of access a minority group has to enjoy its rights during periods of geopolitical pressure. Additionally, the study builds upon previous research on Russian speakers' reactions to governmental policies concerning commemorating Soviet era monuments. It expands the scope by examining the same group's resistance to education policy changes differently. It uses Dahlgren's civic circuit and ideas about political

(dis)engagement in democratic societies to investigate resistance from a new perspective. Therefore, the study's theoretical approach and comparison between the two periods distinguish it from other academic works and contribute to improving minority rights protection in Latvia.

In future research, conducting interviews with Russian-speaking mesolevel actors in Latvia may be beneficial. Using interviews as a research method will allow for a thorough examination of resistance strategies, providing future researchers with first-hand material. Additionally, data collected from the interviews will be free from media intervention, which could impact data quality. This is important because media ownership can sometimes skew reality to serve its interests. Another research suggestion would be to review news pieces from Latvian-speaking media. There is a possibility that the Russian-speaking actors are expressing their resistance endeavours in Latvian-speaking media. Thus, it would be interesting to compare what the same actors say about their resistance in these media and to check for any differences in how the Latvian and Russian-speaking media sources transmit the actors' views on resistance.

Finally, the analysis showed that economism played a part in shaping human rights in Latvia. Therefore, it may be beneficial to investigate further the relationship between human rights and policymaking centered on economic efficiency and to identify potential solutions for implementing policy in Latvia with a stronger focus on human rights. The resistance of the Russian-speaking minority can provide a starting point for studying how minority rights are safeguarded in challenging geopolitical situations and for promoting diverse societies based on human rights.

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9. Appendix

9.1 Appendix I. Coding Dictionary

In this section, I will define the codes and subcodes I used for my qualitative text analysis. The codes were identified through descriptive coding, which involved an initial word search across Russian-speaking media channels. I developed analytical codes after establishing the descriptive codes and categorizing them based on the actor, type of media, date, and media source name. Subsequently, I generated subcodes after familiarizing myself with the data.

Analytical codes:

Here are the analytical codes that emerged through descriptive coding.

Code: Engaging in resistance acts

This code contains text passages that refer to the resistance actions of Russian-speaking mesolevel actors who participated in or organized resistance against the education amendments from 2018 to 2023.

Subcode	Definition
Intense participation	Text passages that highlight the intensity of the resistance actions and strategies of the mesolevel actors.
Moderate participation	Text passages that referred to the lack of resistance actions and strategies by the mesolevel actors.

Code: Need for belonging

This code refers to text passages that indicated when the Russian-speaking mesolevel

actors felt excluded from the social and political life in Latvia and policymaking decisions. It also pointed to text passages in which the mesolevel actors articulated their desire for belonging and shifting from the Russian to the Latvian identity.

Subcode	Definition
As citizens of Latvia	Text passages that indicated cases where the Russian-speaking actors wanted to be included in the education policymaking and have the right to resist appealing to their citizenship.
As citizens of the same nation	Text passages that showed cases where the Russian-speaking actors wanted to be included in the education decision making and have the right to resist appealing to their Latvian identity.

Code: Stigmatization

This code included text passages with examples of persecution, harassment and stigmatization of the Russian-speaking mesolevel actors due to their participation in resistance activities or their advocacy in favor of minority language education at schools by the State Security Police.

Subcode	Definition
Persecution	Text passages including cases of Russian-speaking mesolevel actors' arrest, strip of professional license to work or filed complaints against them either by the State Security police or the

	conservative political party members.
Intimidation	Text passages referring to the practices the State Security Police used to intimidate the Russian-speaking mesolevel actors from engaging into resistance activities or organize them.