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Changing of Surnames in Latvia: recent data

1. Introduction

The goal of this investigation is to give an insight into the trends of changing surnames in one of the Baltic countries, Latvia: to show the changes and their possible motivations in general, focusing on the most recent data of the last years (2021–2023).

The changing of names and surnames in Latvia has become a subject of growing academic interest, reflecting broader questions around identity, integration, and cultural heritage (see LIPŠA 2006; BALODE 2018; GRĪVIŅA 2019; BALODE 2020; BALODE–GRĪVIŅA 2020; BALODE–BALODIS 2024, etc.). This article explores recent surname change trends in Latvia, using comprehensive data from the Department of the Citizenship and Migration Affairs, which provides for scientific reasons a list of changes without any comments of the motivation or reasons in a new surname choices change. Unfortunately without interviews with persons who decided to change their name or surname it is impossible to speak about actual reasons or to analyze so called onomastic dysphoria (on this term, see PUZEY 2024: 123), but there are definitely rather many cases when onomasticians could guess about possible reasons “extreme mismatch an individual may experience between their own name and their self-concept” (PUZEY 2024: 81). Nevertheless this list is foundation for analyzing changes in surname choices, and the societal implications of these changes, particularly in the context of Latvia's evolving geopolitical situation and international influences. This study focuses on surname changes driven by personal or societal motivations, not on changing surnames after marriage which is the traditional changing to husband's surname or creating a hyphenated surname, joining two maiden surname and surname of the spouse and which is item of separate study (see BALODIS 2023).

The discussion begins by outlining the legal framework that governs personal name changes in Latvia, followed by a detailed analysis of the recent data and trends observed over last three decades, with the emphasis on the data of the last three years.

Surnames, as one of the central markers of identity, are not immutable, and changes in personal names often reflect deeper social and political transformations, reflecting societal hierarchies and cultural shifts.



2. Data sources and anthroponymic material

The basis of this article is a list of different cases of surname changes (a total of 65,365, starting in three decades of independence of Latvia; data obtained in 2020), compiled by the Citizenship and Migration Affairs Department of the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Latvia (*Pilsonības un migrācijas lietu pārvalde*, hereafter the abbreviation PMLP). As additional source—the list of the changes of the given names and surnames of recent 3 years (2021, 2022, 2023)—about 15,000 cases, including only changes of the citizens of Latvia, i.e., this is anthroponymic material of changes in a new geopolitical situation. As additional source for this study was used official information distributed in media by the Civil Registry Department (Ministry of Justice).

Starting with the figures published by the Civil Registry Department of the Ministry of Justice, each year in Latvia about 1,000–1,200 cases of the personal name changes are reviewed (data from UPĪTE 2021). Recently, the number of surname changes has been steadily increasing: in 2021, there were 1,561 decisions granting permission to change surnames, 1,977 decisions in 2022, and 2,067 decisions in 2023 (data from the Release of The Ministry of Justice, see Tieslietu ministrija 2024). Usually, first and last name given by parents indicate ethnicity, i.e. ethnic belonging (JAKAITĒ-BULBUKIENĒ 2015: 9). Therefore surname changes are closely linked to registered changes in nationality which is allowed to change in Latvia only once per life (BALODE–BALODIS 2024): “[...] person in the Republic of Latvia is entitled to change the nationality record once to the direct ascending line thereof within the limits of two generations if he or she has reached 15 years of age and can prove the kinship with the persons referred to.” (Likumi.lv 2009.) According to data from the Department of Civil Registration of the Ministry of Justice, the change line of nationality is in an uptrend: there were 20 cases of nationality changes in 2021, 125 cases in 2022, 94 cases in 2023. Most persons in 2023 have renounced their Russian nationality in their passports, perhaps in the connection with a war situation in Europe. 31 persons changed their nationality to “Latvian”, 10 persons changed their nationality to Ukrainian, others changed to Jewish, Polish, Armenian, Lithuanian, Livonian (Liv), Russian, and German. (Tieslietu ministrija 2024.)

3. Theoretical and legal basis

As highlighted in many studies, given names and surnames are particularly important and sensitive aspects of our identity, which can be highly complex. People are usually very sensitive to any distortion in the name and surname, every diacritical mark is very important. Our first identity is not chosen by us; it is ‘assigned’ by nature (as girl or boy), by fate (determining the country and



family into which we are born), and by people who have power over us (such as choosing our name). Who assigns a name to a child? It could be the mother, father, both parents, grandparents, siblings, other relatives, or even family friends. Consequently, a significant portion of our identity is shaped by factors beyond our control. This article, however, shifts its focus from analyzing identity as reflected in names to exploring trends in personal name changes.

This article is devoted to contemporary surname changes, without dwelling on the historical legislation and historical changes of surnames. Here is only a very brief touch on the first documents created by the Republic of Latvia: cf. first historical document “Law on the Change of Surnames”, the Constitutional Assembly adopted this Law in 1920. The idea of this Law was to help Latvian citizens to get the surname they themselves had chosen, instead of the one they were given by a baron or a parish scribe. The next decision of the Cabinet of Ministers concerning personal names was “The Instruction on Writing Names and Surnames in Passports”, issued in 1927. It was connected with the transition to a new orthography (BALODE–GRĪVIŅA 2020: 23, 24). It has to be mentioned separately the “Law on the change of surnames” promulgated by President Kārlis Ulmanis in December 1939. The principle of nationality is emphasised in this Law: only citizens of Latvian nationality may choose surnames of Latvian origin; the change often helped to escape repressions (LIPŠA 2006).

During the years of the first independence of the Republic of Latvia in 1920–1940 approximately 9,400 persons changed their surnames (data from LVVA). The historical reasons for changing surnames at this time are already studied and described (GRĪVIŅA 2019; BALODE–GRĪVIŅA 2022).

It seems self-evident that a person's name and surname are not immutable personal data nowadays, too. Conditions and provisions when personal names can be changed are clearly regulated by the “Law on the Change of a Given Name, Surname and Nationality Record of Latvia” (see Likumi.lv 2009), where it is declared that the change is possible from 15 years of age and if one of the following reasons exists:

- 1) the given name or surname encumbers the integration of the person in society;
- 2) the person wishes to add a second name to the name recorded in the Birth Register. The name that has been entered in the Register first, shall be considered the primary name;
- 3) the person wishes to acquire or add the surname of the spouse to his or her surname;
- 4) the person wishes to acquire his or her historic family name in the direct ascending line;



- 5) the person wishes to regain his or her family name or premarital surname;
- 6) the gender of the person has changed;
- 7) one of the parents or both parents of a minor have been convicted of committing a deliberate, serious or especially serious crime;
- 8) the person wishes to acquire the surname of the mother or father.

The analysis of the changing cases and comments of the official authorities testify, that most often reasons are these mentioned in the law under paragraph 1 and 5. As it was mentioned before, changes of surnames provided under paragraphs 3, 6 and 7 are not under focus of this article.

4. Variety of changing cases nowadays

The study's data, drawn from both the Citizenship and Migration Affairs Department and the Ministry of Justice, reveal a number of trends in surname changes in Latvia.

One of the most frequent motives for changing is the adaptation of surnames to international transcription standards, particularly for surnames of non-Latvian origin, reflecting a trend toward simplified, internationally recognizable forms of surnames, for instance:

Bičkovs → *Bychkov* 11x¹, *Cigankova* → *Tsygankova* 9x, *Dmitrijeva* → *Dmitrieva* 52x, *Fjodorovs* → *Fedorov* 64x, *Kakoškins* → *Kakoshkin*, *Kaļiņina* → *Kalinina* 20x, *Čača* → *Chacha*, *Cine* → *Tsine* 2x.

Very often, perhaps in preparation for leaving Latvia and emigrating, individuals choose to remove Latvian diacritics and gender-specific endings from their personal names. For example:

Cimbals → *Tsimbal*, *Dageļa* → *Dagel*, *Ivanovs* → *Ivanov* 207x.

The second most common reason, equally significant, is the effort to correct spelling errors in documents that have accumulated over the years under various circumstances. For instance:

¹ Number mentioned after surname in this article shows the number of cases registered by PMLP. If the surname is changed only once, the number is not mentioned. Due to privacy policy, no given names / first names are mentioned in this study of changing of the surnames. Social scientists must, of course, be concerned with protecting the privacy of inhabitants, so these examples are presented in coordination with the PMLP and strictly for scientific purposes. Through interviews, source studies, and observations, researchers can obtain valuable information; however, ensuring the exclusion of individuals who have not provided consent remains a challenge (PUZEY 2024). Also Latvian surname changes indicating gender changing (gender in Latvian is denoted by the ending of the personal name) are not mentioned in this article.



Ciruļ → *Cīrule*, *Čakurs* → *Čākurs*, *Eķis* → *Ēķis*, *Harkalns* → *Garkalns*, *Irbīts* → *Irbītis*.

One of the most common reasons for changing is the avoidance of surnames with undesirable semantics or unacceptable euphony, i.e., it hinders a person's integration into society, for example, surnames of Latvian origin, mostly coined from nicknames, many from the primary semantics of fauna:

Klibiķis 'lame' changed to surname with more positive connotation → *Lācis* 'bear', *Knislis* 'gnat' → *Lapsiņš* < dim. *lapsa* 'fox', *Muša* 'fly' → *Kārkliņš* < dim. *kārklis* 'willow', *Prusaks* 'cockroach' → *Priede* 'pine tree', *Dakša* 'fork' → *Gulbis* 'swan', *Desainis* < *desa* 'sausage' → *Legzdiņš* < dim. dial. *legzda* 'hazel tree' (Tezaurs.lv), *Dižgalvis* 'bighead' → *Niedra* 'reed', *Garkakle* 'long neck' → *Blaua* < Germ. Surname *Blau* 'blue' (KOHLEHEIM–KOHLEHEIM 2000: 134), *Greizis* 'crooked' → *Barons* 'baron', *Kuprītis* < dim. *kupris* 'hump, humpback' → *Kalvis* 'smith', *Nulle* 'zero' → *Salnājs* < *salna* 'frost', *Dorša* 'codfish' → *Līdaka* 'pike' (in this case one fish name is changed to another fish name, but the first one, *dorša*, is used more in colloquial speech).

Also surnames of non-Latvian origin with undesirable semantics, mostly surnames originated from nicknames, are changed: *Černomords*, surname of Russian origin with the primary semantics 'black-face' (cf. *Черномордик* UNBEGAUN 1989: 265, *Черноморди́ков* GANZHINA 2001: 542) → *Gaisma* 'light', *Nakonečņijs* Russ. 'final' → *Paeglis* 'juniper'.

Bad association or euphony of the surname which interferes with the quality of life is a main motive for such changes as following: *Cišs* → *Akmens* 'stone', *Cīcis* → *Zvirgds* 'pebble, gravel', *Cjuļs* → *Ozoliņš* < dim. *ozols* 'oak', *Čaba* → *Dzelzkalna* 'iron hill', *Čačka* → *Lapiņš* dim. 'fox', *Džijs* → *Zvaigzne* 'star', *Fālis* → *Priedulājs* 'pineforest'.

These cases reflect a broader desire among individuals to conform to societal expectations and avoid negative social or psychological associations with their personal names.

Often a person chooses to change a foreign-origin surname to a Latvian-origin surname, for example, former German origin surname: *Cīgenhāgens* → *Mednis* 'wood grouse', *Danenbergs* → *Avotiņš* < dim. *avots* 'water spring', *Freimanis* → *Lauva* 'lion', *Fridrihsons* → *Vaivars* 'marsh rosemary, wild rosemary', *Reinbergs* → *Roze* 'rose', *Rozenbergs* → *Meldrājs* 'reed'; or former Slavonic origin surname: *Čabanovs* → *Krēsliņš* < dim. Latv. *krēsls* 'chair', *Čerkašins* → *Namiķis* 'janitor; stove burner', *Černika* → *Krieviņa* < dim. Latv. *krievs* 'Russian', *Čumakovs* → *Vītols* 'willow', *Domkovs* → *Liepa* 'linden tree', *Iļjašenko* → *Līcis* 'bay', *Ivanovs* → *Zaķītis* < dim. Latv. *zaķis* 'hare, bunny', *Ivanovs* → *Laimīgais* 'happy, lucky', *Karkovskis* → *Liniņš* < dim. Latv. *lins*



‘flax’, *Koļesniks* → *Lasis* ‘salmon’, *Ļesņičijs* → *Vilnis* ‘wave’, *Pavlovs* → *Pūce* ‘owl’, *Pendrakovskis* → *Bērziņš* < dim. Latv. *bērzs* ‘birch’ (for German surname ethymology see KOHLHEIM–KOHLHEIM 2000; for Russian surname ethymology see NIKONOV 1993; GANZHINA 2001). Almost all new chosen Latvian surnames are personal names with positive connotation from lexicon denoting nature. Typically, when changing a surname, the initial letter is retained, for example: *Kiseļevs* → *Krastiņš*, *Kleinbergs* → *Kalnājs*.

However, there are also examples of the opposite trend, where a Latvian surname is changed to foreign-origin surname (Slavonic or Germanic), for instance: *Cinis* ‘a small prominence on the ground’ → *Kahanovičs*, *Elksnis* ‘elm’ → *Miņins*, *Miezis* ‘barley’ → *Novokreščenijs* (cf. Russian *Новокрестьянин* ‘newly baptized’ GANZHINA 2001: 339), *Dzelme* ‘depth’ → *Štelmahers*, *Čiekurs* ‘cone’ → *Freimanis*. Such type of changes is often linked to family history and represent a return to one's ancestral roots.

One of the reasons for changing surnames is the excessive length or complexity of a personal name, making it difficult to use. For instance: *Citronbaum* → *Citrone*, *Dimantakalns* → *Skrastiņš*, *Eizengraudiņš* → *Šupiņš*, *Krūverers* → *Leo*, *Lapinskis* → *Lapa*, *Latakaitis* → *Lataks*, *Melnbārzdis* → *Kalējs*, *Renckulbergs* → *Bīriņš*, *Serebrjakovs* → *Avotiņš*.

Double surnames are often shortened, choosing one of the components: *Didrihsons-Linards-Nuka* → *Nuka*, *Hackevičs-Katkevičs* → *Katkevičs*, thus also avoiding an undesirable semantics: *Kociņš-Klucis* < Latv. *klucis* ‘block, clog’ → *Kociņš* < dim. Latv. *koks* ‘tree’, *Konstants-Plācenis* < Latv. ‘scone’ → *Konstants* < surname of anthroponymic origin, cf. Latv. given name *Konstans* < *Konstantīns* (SILIŅŠ 1990: 198), or instead of double-barrelled surname choosing a new third surname of the different root: *Hauptmanis-Autmanis* → *Virsaitis* ‘chief’.

Occasionally, though rarely, the opposite trend can be observed: a surname is lengthened by adding another surname with a hyphen, often reflecting the individual's family history: *Kārklīšs* → *Kārklīšs-Zaržeckis*, *Ķeišs* → *Ķeišs-Pukītis*.

Although less common than in the 1920s and 1930s (BALODE–GRĪVIŅA 2020: 28–29), here are still examples of surname translations even today. For instance: *Melnstrazds* Latv. ‘black trush’ → *Blekbērds* < Latvian spelling of Eng. *black bird*, *Riekstiņš* < dim. Latv. *rieksts* ‘nut’ → *Orehovs* < Russian surname *Opexov* < *opex* ‘nut’ (UNBEGAUN 1989: 153), *Rozenbergs* < cf. German surname < toponym *Rosenberg* ‘hill of roses’ (KOHLHEIM–KOHLHEIM 2000: 552) → *Rožkalns* < Latv. *roze* ‘rose’ + *kalns* ‘mountain, hill’.



Observations show that often a surname is changed simultaneously by husband and wife or the entire family: *Čeburaškina* → *Gulbe* and *Čeburaškins* → *Gulbis*, *Droņa* → *Bezbaile* and *Droņa* → *Bezbalis*, choosing personal names with positive connotations (cf. Latv. *gulbis* ‘swan’, *bezbalis* ‘fearless’) (BALODE–BALODIS 2024: 10).

A comparison of surname changes in the previous three decades with changes in the last three years (2021–2023) shows that large part of the mentioned motivation is similar: people most often are asking to change their personal name, stating that the name makes it difficult for a person to integrate into society. The surname is most often changed: 1) in order to recover maiden surname; 2) regain family surname in the direct ascending line. Sometimes the application indicates that the current surname makes it difficult to integrate into society, i.e., the surname causes unpleasant associations, it makes one feel uncomfortable (Jauns.lv 2023).

Some quotation from mass media illustrating the reason of surname change:

“Arvien vairāk Latvijas iedzīvotāju savu slāviskas izcelsmes vārdu vai uzvārdu nomaina pret citu [...]. Iemesls – nevelēšanās, lai vārda dēļ cilvēks tiek saistīts ar agresorvalsti Krieviju [...].” (NRA 2022).

“More and more residents of Latvia are changing their name or surname of Slavic origin to another one [...]. The reason is not wanting to be associated with the aggressor country Russia [...].”

Solvita Saukuma-Laimere, the Director of the Department of Civil Registrations, giving interview in 2023, concludes:

“Pēdējā laikā ļoti bieži novērojami gadījumi, kad persona ar slāvu izcelsmes uzvārdu vēlas to mainīt uz latviskā vidē vairāk piemērotu uzvārdu, piemēram, uz *Liepiņš*, *Ozoliņš* un citiem.” (Jauns.lv 2023).

“Recently, there have been very frequent cases when a person with a surname of Slavic origin wants to change it to a surname that is more suitable in the Latvian environment, for example *Liepiņš*, *Ozoliņš* and others.”

5. Surname changes choosing the most popular Latvian family names

Examples of surname changes over the past three years highlight how frequently individuals opt for the most popular Latvian surnames² as a means of integrating into Latvian society.

In recent years, a significant number of Latvia's inhabitants have changed their surnames from foreign origins, primarily Slavonic or Germanic, to more common Latvian surnames, for instance, changes to the fourth most common surname on the Top 10 list *Ozoliņš*³ < Latv. *ozols* 'oak' + dim. suffix *-iņ-*: it appears on the changing list as m. g. *Ozoliņš* registered 24x, and as f. g. *Ozoliņa* 56x:

Afoņins → *Ozoliņš*, *Gurskis* → *Ozoliņš*, *Kiriļenko* → *Ozoliņš*, *Ļitvinčuks* → *Ozoliņš*, *Nikitins* → *Ozoliņš*, *Smirnovs* → *Ozoliņš*, *Vasiļjevs* → *Ozoliņš*, *Zalmans* → *Ozoliņš*, etc.

Not only bearers of foreign surnames, but also owners of common or traditional surnames of Latvian origin sometimes choose this popular surnames of flora (tree) semantics as a new family name: *Ziedkalns* 'hill of flowers' → *Ozoliņš*, *Zvirbulis* 'sparrow' → *Ozoliņš*.

One can also observe the opposite direction of changing surnames—when the bearer of the surname *Ozoliņš* obviously does not like that there are so many persons with this surname, and he prefers less common family name of Latvian origin for example: *Ozoliņš* → *Vecozols* 'old oak', *Ozoliņš* → *Zeilišs* < dial. Latv. *zīle* 'acorn' (in these cases also connect with oak tree), or even to some surname of foreign origin (maybe family name/surname registered in ancient documents): *Ozoliņš* → *Vilsons*, *Ozoliņš* → *Kasparsons*.

Even more often Latvian inhabitants choose a new surname *Bērziņš* which is number one on the Top 10 list of all surnames < Latv. *bērzs* 'birch' + dim. suffix *-iņ-*: m. g. *Bērziņ* 25x, f. g. *Bērziņa* 62x, for example, abandoning surnames of foreign origin: *Kabatins* → *Bērziņš*, *Komisarovs* → *Bērziņš*, *Polinskis* → *Bērziņš*, *Griščenko* → *Bērziņš*, *Rinks* → *Bērziņš*, or abandoning surnames of Latvian origin: *Pupausis* → *Bērziņš*, *Bremze* → *Bērziņa*. There are not so many cases when surname *Bērziņš* is changed to some other: *Bērziņš* → *Baltaisbrencis*, *Bērziņš* → *Hovarts*.

² Top 10 of the most popular surnames in Latvia (PMLP data 2024): 1. *Bērziņš* 5,517; 2. *Ivanovs* 5,173; 3. *Kalniņš* 4,393; 4. *Ozoliņš* 4,088; 5. *Jansons* 3,044; 6. *Ozols* 2,947; 7. *Liepiņš* 2,710; 8. *Krūmiņš* 2,710; 9. *Vasiļjevs* 2,240; 10. *Balodis* 2,239.

³ On the origin and popularity of Latvian surnames of flora primary semantics (tree names), see BLESE 1929: 140; BALODIS 2018: 410–423.



One more very popular surname of flora (tree) semantics—the 7th most popular surname on the Top 10 list—*Liepiņš* < Latv. *liepa* ‘linden-tree’ + dim. suffix *-iņ-*—is rather popular choosing a new surname: m. g. *Liepiņš* 16x, f. g. *Liepiņa* 48x, for example, surnames of German, Slavonic as well as Latvian origin have been changed in favor of *Liepiņš* : *Ivanovs* → *Liepiņš*, *Iljins* → *Liepiņš*, *Primaks* → *Liepiņš*, *Jakimenko* → *Liepiņš*, *Junkers* → *Liepiņš*, *Švāne* → *Liepiņa*, *Tiršs* → *Liepiņš*, *Priede* → *Liepiņa* (the last example is rather interesting: one tree semantics surname *Priede* ‘pine-tree’ is changed to another tree semantics surname ‘linden-tree’ f. g.).

As the last example from the Top 10 list—which recently is the second most popular surname in Latvia—*Kalniņš* < Latv. physiogeographical term *kalns* ‘hill’ + dim. suffix *-iņ-*—also is one of the favourite in surname changing: m. g. *Kalniņš* 15x, f. g. *Kalniņa* 42x, for instance: *Hritaņkova* → *Kalniņa*, *Kulikovs* → *Kalniņš*, *Krilovs* → *Kalniņš*, *Kuzmina* → *Kalniņa*, *Smertjeva* → *Kalniņa*, *Terentičeva* → *Kalniņa*, *Timofejeva* → *Kalniņa*, *Tomaševskis* → *Kalniņš*. As shown by several examples, when changing the surname, it is very common to preserve the the same initial letter of the previous surname.

It was already mentioned that sometimes people try to avoid such very popular surnames, to be more individual as in these cases, changing vice versa: *Kalniņš* → *Freibergs*, *Kalniņš* → *Frīsons*, *Kalniņš* → *Granaps-Granovskis*.

Among the most frequently changed surnames nowadays in Latvia are *Ivanovs/Ivanova*, *Fjodorovs/Fjodorova*, *Mihailovs/Mihailova*, *Ozoliņš/Ozoliņa*, *Kalniņš/Kalniņa*. They are also among the most spread surnames in Latvia (BALODE–BALODIS 2024: 10).

Recently it is clearly expressed tendency to change both name and surname⁴, also preserving initial letter of the name and surname, i.e., keeping the same initial letters. More often than earlier foreign surnames of different origin are chosen as a new ones, for instance: *Bergmane*, *Tompsons*, *Koha*, *Lange*, *Dafi*, *Susi*, *Lī*, *Love*, *Martinelli*, *Pae*.

Here is one real-life example from mass media: the popular actor *Intars Rešetins* has announced about changing surname to *Rešetins-Pētersons*, and explained this step: “labskanīgais *Pētersons* – mammas dzimtas uzvārds un to pievienojis esošajam, lai būtu spēks arī no otras dzimtas” / “that the good-sounding *Pētersons* is the surname of mother’s family and I added it to the existing one so that there would be strength from the other family as well” (Delfi Life 2024).

⁴ Due to protection of personal security, examples of such changes are not mentioned in this article.



As argued by BALODE and BALODIS (2024: 10), this study reveals strong inclination of the inhabitants of Latvia to adapt their surnames to the modern global social and cultural environment. It reflects the ongoing development of identity and underscores surname changes in the context of societal integration. These findings are especially supported by recent examples of surname changes that have occurred from 2021 to 2023.

6. Conclusions

Analysis of surname changes during previous three decades in Latvia, especially focusing on the most recent data of the last years (2021–2023) shows trends in choosing a new surname. Although the motivation for surname changes is not available to anthroponymic researchers, certain conclusions can be drawn from the changing list. Thousands of examples obtained from the Department of Citizenship and Migration indicate a variety of changing cases.

This study demonstrates several clearly expressed tendencies.

First of all, there is a noticeable desire among inhabitants to adapt their surnames to the modern social and cultural global context, aiming to align with European or global norms. This includes tendencies to avoid Latvian diacritical marks, adapt surnames to international transcription standards, and even drop Latvian endings that indicate gender and enable declension. A clear trend toward surname simplification is evident, with personal names often being shortened and double-barrelled surnames reduced to simpler, single-root forms.

The list of surname changes allow to conclude that the majority of cases highlight the necessity of correcting spelling errors in official documents, as even a single letter or diacritical mark can be crucial for accurately reflecting personal identity.

One of the most common reasons for changing surnames is the avoidance of those with undesirable semantics or unacceptable euphony, as these can hinder a person's integration into society. For example, many Latvian-origin surnames with transparent primary meanings, often derived from former nicknames, are associated with fauna (names of livestock, animals, insects). In contrast, new surnames are frequently chosen from categories with positive primary meanings, such as flora (especially names of trees, flowers) or physiographical terms (e.g., hills, lakes, rivers). These cases reflect a broader desire to avoid negative social or psychological associations.

Very often, individuals in Latvia choose to change a foreign-origin surname (German or Slavonic) to a Latvian-origin surname, typically one with a positive connotation. Many such surnames are replaced by some of the most popular Latvian surnames, such as *Bērziņš*, *Kalniņš*, *Ozoliņš*, or *Liepiņš*. However,



there are also cases where Latvian surnames are changed to foreign-origin family names. These changes are often linked to family history, reflecting a return to ancestral roots, such as a grandparent's surname.

Observations indicate that, nowadays, it is common for a surname to be changed simultaneously by both husband and wife or even the entire family. Furthermore, compared to historical times, it is now more frequent for both the given name and surname to be changed together, thereby completely transforming personal identity.

The list of surname changes in Latvia reveals the processes of personal identity formation and development. The analysis highlights these changes within the context of societal integration and the evolving geopolitical situation.

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Abstract

The article is based on many years study of the list of surname changes in Latvia, using data from the Department of the Citizenship and Migration Affairs (Ministry of Internal Affairs). It provides an insight into surname change trends in the three decades, especially paying attention to the last 3 years, which reflect broader processes of societal integration, cultural adaptation as well as new geopolitical situation. These surname changes open a window for personal and public conversations about identity and heritage.

This article introduces with the data and anthroponymic material of the study as well as with the legal basis of changing personal names in Latvia. Traditional practices, such as women changing surnames upon marriage, are not included in this study. Main part of the article is devoted to key motivations for surname changes including adapting surnames to international transcription norms, avoiding diacritical marks, dropping Latvian endings, changing surnames of undesirable semantics or unacceptable euphony, which hinders a person's integration into society. Many surname changes are related to family history, returning to family roots. Furthermore, the analysis explores changes from foreign-origin (mainly German, Slavonic) surnames to Latvian-origin names, as well as cases where individuals prefer shorter or more culturally resonant names.

Keywords: onomastics, antroponymy, surname changes, Latvia, societal integration

